

Ordination Paper
Michael Steven Dickinson

1 **Faith Journey, Christian Experience, Call to Ministry**

2 While most biographies start with an individual's birth, my faith journey begins six years
3 before with the still-born birth of my sister Mary. According to my mother, it was her pregnancy
4 with Mary that repaired her uterus and made it possible for her to conceive and give birth to her
5 four living children. My name is Michael Steven Dickinson and I was born on August 3, 1960 in
6 Springfield, Massachusetts. My parents are Stanley B. Dickinson Jr. and Virginia J. (Yanez)
7 Dickinson. I am their youngest child. My siblings, besides Mary, are my sisters Cindy and
8 Laurie and my brother Stan.

9 For my first twelve years on this planet the six of us were family and we had a very
10 happy life. My father worked as an electrician with the local power company and, for the most
11 part, my mother was the traditional stay-at-home housewife. She did take a job when I entered
12 second grade, working mother's hours during the school year. My parents gave us a very loving
13 home life, and our house growing up was the "Kool-Aid" house. My parents welcomed all the
14 children in our neighborhood whether they were friends of their children or not.

15 If there were any problems, I never knew about them. Even the major crises that did
16 happen--my sister Laurie's three-month hospitalization in 1967 for rheumatic fever, and my
17 grandfather's death in 1968--were handled in such a way that, as a child, I was never worried.
18 My parents were open about the seriousness of my sister's illness and the damage it caused to
19 her heart, not out of fear but so that we would know what she could do as she recovered.

20 When my grandfather died, I remember my mother telling us he died in his sleep and that
21 he was in Heaven with Jesus. She made sure that we understood that we would see him again
22 someday in heaven and that he was in a better place now. I also remember being told that tears
23 were okay, but Granddad was happier now that he was reunited with my grandmother.

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24 My life changed dramatically in 1972 when I was eleven. It was in that year that my
25 father was diagnosed with and died of lung cancer. As I look back at that time, I remember that
26 my parents were very matter of fact about the disease. They didn't try to hide the severity of the
27 illness or how difficult the treatment would be for my father. He had a surgical procedure
28 followed by radiation treatment. They tried hard not to let the illness affect our life. It was never
29 just my dad who was going to beat cancer; it was all of us. Our family would beat cancer by
30 living a normal life. We never missed school. My mother still made sure that birthdays were
31 celebrated. When the cancer did take his life, we knew that like our grandfather, he was in a
32 better place even though we missed him terribly. However, to be honest, his death rocked our
33 world as a family.

34 Prior to my father's death, church and Sunday school were not seen as a priority in my
35 home. It may have been because my parents came from different faith traditions. My mother
36 was raised a Roman Catholic and my father was raised in a mainline Protestant church. Because
37 of their differences, my father left our religious instruction up to my mother. My mother had a
38 conflict with the parish priest and put off having us go to the local Catholic church. The church
39 issue was resolved after my father met the pastor of Foster Memorial Church, United Church of
40 Christ, in Springfield, Ma. Reverend Dean and my father had a common interest in motorcycles.
41 Their friendship made it easier for my mother to attend a church outside of her tradition and
42 Foster became our home church.

43 As a family we attended church primarily on the holidays, Christmas Eve and Easter.
44 Our Sunday School attendance was spotty at best, with us usually being rushed out of the house
45 when my parents heard the first church bell reminding them that we had 20 minutes to get to the
46 church.

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47 It was my father's death in 1972 that really started me on my faith journey. After his
48 death, my mother insisted that I go to church more regularly. Initially, going to church wasn't
49 where I wanted to be. That all changed when I was asked by the Youth Choir Director to be a
50 character in a musical they were putting on at Foster. This led me to become more involved in
51 youth activities. Through the youth group, I met John Smith who was the Jr. High Youth Group
52 leader. Mr. Smith challenged me to read the Bible if I wanted to know God. I accepted his
53 challenge. In the summer of 1975 when I was 14, I read the New Testament for the first time.
54 When I was done, I felt as if Jesus was asking me if he could come into my heart. Having just
55 read Revelation I remember reading words that reflected what I felt Jesus was saying to me.
56 This and scripture that told me that God wanted to be a father to me made my answer easy. It
57 was then that I accepted Jesus as my savior. It also was then that my grief for my father finally
58 began to resolve.

59 The following year, 1976, my mother came to a point when she felt ready to begin dating
60 again. She met a man, Norman Charette, and on July 30, 1977 they married. I had just finished
61 my sophomore year in high school when their marriage increased my family by adding two new
62 older sisters, a younger brother, a niece and a brother-in-law. We were by no means the "Brady
63 Bunch" but over the years we truly became a family. This was most noticeable when my mother
64 died suddenly in 1985. The blended family that was created in 1977 pulled together to support
65 each other as we grieved the loss of our mother.

66 In June 1979, I graduated from Minnechaug Regional High School, in Wilbraham, Ma
67 and that September I started at Westfield State College. I graduated from Westfield State in
68 1983 with a bachelor's degree in history and a minor in psychology. After college I worked at

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69 the local Showcase Cinemas for 18 months. I entered the United States Air Force in January
70 1985, a month before my mother died.

71 The following year on April 26, 1986, I married Juanita Green of Hingham,
72 Massachusetts. Juanita and I had met at Westfield State College back in 1979. She was the first
73 girl I met on campus and she was my best friend long before she agreed to marry me. After our
74 wedding, Juanita moved to Mildenhall, England where I was stationed with the Air Force as an
75 Administrative Specialist.

76 While stationed in England we welcomed our daughter, Virginia, who was born in
77 February 1987 and our son, Noah, who was born 14 months later in April 1988. It was also in
78 1988 when the Air Force transferred me to Hanscom Air Force Base, near Bedford,
79 Massachusetts. In May 1993, Juanita and I became foster parents to brothers David and Kevin.
80 Their sister was born that October and on Halloween our treat was when Hannah came to our
81 home. We adopted them two years later June 25, 1995. In 2004 my elder daughter married
82 Jason Cox and their union brought two grandchildren into the family.

83 With one exception, my Air Force career was uneventful. I had a total of three duty
84 stations. I was stationed at RAF Mildenhall, England June 1985 to June 1988. Then I was
85 transferred to Hanscom AFB, Massachusetts, where I was stationed from June 1988 to May
86 2003. In May 2003 I was transferred to the Pentagon in Washington D.C. where I was stationed
87 until June 1, 2005 when I retired from active duty.

88 The one exception to my uneventful Air Force career occurred during the summer of
89 1996 when I was on temporary duty in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. Terrorists bombed Khobar
90 Towers, where we lived and worked. Nineteen Airmen died that day and over 350 were injured.

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91 Fortunately, at the time of the attack I was not on base. As traumatic as that time was I was able
92 to see the bravery of many service members and to hear how God protected many who were near
93 the blast zone. After the attack, my job was to find anything that wasn't damaged from the blast
94 and was salvageable. As I went from room to room there was the constant sound of broken glass
95 under my feet. The smell in my damaged building was a cross between spoiled food and blood.
96 Once pristine living quarters had window air conditioners thrown across the room from the force
97 of the blast. Outside walls were cracked from the ground to the roof and the rooms were in
98 shambles.

99 One room I entered was strangely quiet. It was the only room in the building in which
100 the windows were not broken, and nothing was damaged. When I found the sergeant who lived
101 in that room, he told me that his daughter was at a church service in the U.S. at the time of the
102 bombing. She had interrupted the service to ask the minister to pray for her dad. Meanwhile his
103 was the only room that was spared. Even though it was a difficult time for me, witnessing the
104 resilience and faith of so many made this horrible time bearable.

105 Regardless of where I lived or attended church over the years, I always found myself
106 active in ministry. Most of the time I would serve where ever I was asked. In England I served
107 on the chapel finance committee. At the next church, Faith Fellowship, I was in the nursery on
108 Sunday changing diapers. Youth became my niche for several years. It was Captain Bill
109 Burrell, the chaplain at Hanscom AFB who told me that I was missing my calling and that I
110 should consider full time ministry. There was a part of me that wanted to argue with him. I
111 remember telling him he was crazy, but his comments were confirmation of what I was already
112 feeling, that God wanted me to do more than teach the high school students. After a lot of prayer
113 and soul searching I enrolled in seminary in the fall of 2002 at Andover Newton Theological

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114 School (ANTS). Unfortunately, my seminary career was put on hold because of my transfer to
115 the Pentagon in 2003.

116 After I retired from the military I floundered around between jobs and school. In 2010 I
117 returned to Massachusetts so that I could complete my degree at ANTS. During my time at
118 ANTS, one of the many things I discovered was that I no longer felt that I belonged to the United
119 Church of Christ, the denomination that I was raised in. One of the compelling reasons was the
120 example of love that I saw in my wife's family church, First Baptist Church in Hingham. It was
121 at FBC Hingham that I saw love in action and was really encouraged to pursue ministry. That
122 church family allowed me to cut my teeth in ministry and supported my call. With FBC
123 Hingham I went on my first mission trip to Honduras which was another example of how the
124 church shares God's love. FBC Hingham continued to inspire me as I completed my field
125 education, facilitated Bible Studies and led worship services. I was also inspired by the work of
126 the Executive Board of the Old Colony Baptist Association of TABCOM where I served as clerk
127 for over two years.

128 After I graduated from Andover Newton in 2013 FBC Hingham called me to be an
129 associate pastor. While serving there my name was given to the search committee of the
130 American Baptist Community Church in Big Flats, NY. In November 2015, I was called to be
131 the settled pastor of The American Baptist Community Church of Big Flats, New York. This
132 experience has only strengthened my desire to serve God, the church and the community both
133 with my congregation and with other local churches.

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THEOLOGY

136 **GOD**

137 I believe in God, but words often fail me when I try to describe God. I believe God is the
138 creator of all things. God's creation reflects the complexity of who God is. I believe that God is
139 made up of three unique individuals, the Trinity, traditionally described as Father, Son, and Holy
140 Spirit. I believe God is a spirit and neither masculine nor feminine. God can just as accurately
141 be referred to as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. God is all knowing, all powerful, and God is
142 everywhere. Most of all, God is love.

143 **JESUS**

144 Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity. He was with God, as the Word, at the
145 very foundation of all creation. Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Jesus is a unique
146 expression of God's love. He was given as a gift to humanity to show human beings how to live
147 and to bring a way for all people to return to full fellowship with God. Jesus is an example for
148 all of humanity in that He lived a sinless and blameless life. Nonetheless, He was illegally tried
149 and executed by the religious powers of the day. Jesus willingly accepted death on the cross to
150 be our sacrifice and to fully repay all of humanity's debt of sin. God knew Jesus' innocence and
151 accepted His sacrificial death as the full price to redeem all humanity.

152 **HOLY SPIRIT**

153 The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit was with the creator
154 and redeemer at the creation of the world. It was also through the Holy Spirit that Jesus was
155 conceived as a human. It was the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead and it is the Holy
156 Spirit who dwells within my own spirit. The Holy Spirit was given to believers by God to be our

157 comforter, to be our strength and to be our guide. Because the Holy Spirit dwells in me, I can
158 successfully stand against all attacks of the Devil and his agents in the world.

159 **HUMANITY**

160 Scripture states in Genesis that on the sixth day God created humanity in God's image.
161 God gave humanity the task of watching over and caring for all of creation. Unlike the other
162 living things, human beings were created to have a relationship with God and was given the gift
163 of free will. Free will allows humanity to choose between life and death. Life means to live
164 with and have relationship with God now and for all eternity. Death means to be separated from
165 God now and for all eternity. Humanity chooses death by disobeying God. Sin, disobeying God,
166 continues to keep us separated from God, but Jesus has made a way to break the hold of sin on
167 humanity.

168 **SALVATION**

169 Salvation is to have our relationship with God reestablished and eternal life with God
170 returned to humanity. This life was lost when sin, was chosen by humans. Because of sin, death
171 came to our entire being in that we could not have a full relationship with God. All flesh will die
172 but those who have accepted Jesus as Savior will be raised from the dead on the last day when
173 Jesus returns from heaven and they will be restored to be the person they were created to be.
174 This can only happen if an individual accepts the truth that Jesus lived a sinless life and his death
175 on the cross was truly a willing sacrifice to show true obedience to God. The sacrificially shed
176 blood of Jesus cleanses us from our sin so that when God looks at a believer, God no longer sees
177 the sin stained individual.

179 **SCRIPTURE**

180 “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for
181 correction, for instruction in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16) For the Christian, scripture is
182 contained in the Holy Bible. The Bible consists of both the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament,
183 and the New Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ. As such, Scripture is the text that we use to
184 understand the character of God. It is also the document that we use to guide us in our faith and
185 practice. Scripture is a living document in that the words compiled centuries ago by men
186 inspired by the Holy Spirit still apply to us today. The individual and the church should read
187 scripture knowing that God is speaking to them through the written word. The Holy Spirit
188 confirms God’s word as God speaks to and guides the individual’s understanding.

189 **THE CHURCH**

190 The Church is made up of believers in Jesus Christ. The Church is commissioned by
191 Jesus to proclaim the Gospel and to make disciples in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy
192 Spirit. The church knows no boundaries and has been and is still made up of individuals from
193 many nations and languages. While the universal church is made up of the entire Christian
194 population, it is represented locally through many denominations and fellowships who are of like
195 purpose to worship and serve God. The local church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,
196 reaches out to their community to show them the love of God by putting the words and actions of
197 the Gospel of Jesus Christ in motion. It is the local church which should speak when there is an
198 injustice taking place. The church should be feeding and clothing the poor. The church should
199 help the elderly. The church should be loving their neighbors even when they don’t agree with
200 them. It is in this way that the church will make disciples and fulfill the great commission.

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THE ORDINANCES

BAPTISM

The Ordinance of Baptism, the complete immersion of an individual in water, is a public display to show the local community of believers that the individual believes in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Immersion of an individual represents that they have accepted the truth of Christ's death and resurrection. It shows that they have died to sin and are burying that old self under the water. When they emerge from the water, it shows that they are a new creation in Christ. Baptism is an outward way to show the community of believers that a spiritual change has taken place in the believer.

COMMUNION

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, He instituted what we now celebrate as the ordinance of Communion. The sharing of communion is a memorial of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. There are two elements of the Lord's Supper. In the first, the breaking of bread, we recall Jesus telling His disciples that it is His body which will be given for them. For us it is a sign that the church is one in His body. The second element, the wine, represents the blood of Jesus which He shed on the cross to establish a new covenant between humanity and God. The Apostle Paul states, "we are proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Cor 11:26) but I believe that as a spiritual practice communion is a way for all believers to show their devotion to God and to one another. Not only is communion a reminder to the believer what God did for them through Jesus, it is also a reminder to the believer to ensure that they are living life in a manner that gives glory to God.

223 **American Baptist Churches USA and the Code of Ethics**

224 I was not raised in the American Baptist tradition. My joining a local congregation came
225 about as I was discerning where I should worship while attending seminary. When I joined FBC
226 Hingham it was because of the “hoover effect.” Like a vacuum, their love sucked me in. It was
227 an active love that I hadn’t seen practiced in other churches. I found, overall, that the churches
228 in the Old Colony Baptist Association and TABCOM sincerely practice the core principles of the
229 denomination. These principles, often referred to as the “four freedoms,” are 1. Bible Freedom:
230 The Bible is central to all individuals and churches. 2. Soul Freedom: that the individual has the
231 freedom to deal with God without interference from others. 3. Church Freedom: that the local
232 church can worship and manage itself under the guidance of Christ. 4. Religious Freedom: This
233 is the freedom of religion, freedom for religion, or freedom from religion. These principles
234 speak to where I am in my own journey. I value that the denomination acknowledges that our
235 relationship with our Creator is between God and ourselves. I appreciate how individual
236 churches come together to support each other and to further the cause for Christ. I also value the
237 ABC tradition that embraces diversity among believers, knowing that we are still brothers and
238 sisters in Christ even though our understanding of scripture may be different.

239 As an American Baptist Minister, I support and fully endorse our Code of Ethics. I will
240 strive to fulfill my obligations and will not intentionally bring discredit to the church I serve or
241 the denomination at large.