



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, and they 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, including at least 75 semester hours of college. 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 a SBC Church.
- Valid SBC endorsement.
- The normal age limit to apply is 37. Exceptions are made based on experience.
- Citizen of the United States.
- 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, ordination, plus ecclesiastical endorsement.
- 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 employing vocational or volunteer chaplains, each institution 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/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 **Chaplaincy Code of Conduct**. A chaplain's personal character must be consistent with the spiritual leadership required to work with people.
 - › Background Check that includes credit, criminal and sexual offenses.
- Be affiliated with the SBC for a minimum of one year and a member in good standing of a church affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention for at least six months. 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 their exercise of ministry in their ministry context.
- 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 SBC current church. This recognizes the role of the local church in affirming the ministry of the applicant.
- Have theological beliefs currently adopted by the SBC as represented in the **2000 Baptist Faith and Message**. Additionally, applicants and endorsed chaplains are to affirm compliance and support of the following policies:
 - › Divorced people will be assessed with grace and mercy on an individual basis in accordance with NAMB policy.¹
 - › **Chaplaincy Code of Conduct**.
- Vocational chaplains must 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 – The Chaplain Commission will not endorse a chaplain who does not meet the requirements of the employing agency.
- Approval by the Chaplains Commission.

All chaplain endorsements are to a specific ministry position. Any change in that position will require an update or additional endorsement. It is the responsibility of the chaplain to initiate the process for updating an endorsement. After notifying the SBC Chaplaincy Team, at least four weeks should be allowed for the update endorsement process.

¹ For specific details, see Chaplaincy Endorsement Manual, "Divorce and Remarriage," 32.

Any exception to these basic qualifications/requirements must be approved by the Chaplains Commission.

Duration of Endorsements

Endorsement is to a specific position. Any change in employment requires an update of endorsement. Some ministerial training programs have a specified duration. When the chaplain completes the training, the endorsement terminates. Some endorsements have a specified period of 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 be listed as "closed" until an update is requested. A chaplain may request the withdrawal of endorsement at any time. The Chaplain Commission may request the withdrawal of 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 they were endorsed and/or the chaplain no longer meets the SBC requirements for endorsement.

Endorsement Updates

Periodically, the using agency will ask that the chaplain have an updated endorsement. It is the responsibility of the chaplain to initiate the process for updating an endorsement. A chaplain should contact the SBC Chaplaincy Team to request an endorsement update when their status or ministry location changes. Also, endorsement update requests can be made through the chaplain's portal (mynamb.net). Chaplains are allowed to have more than one endorsement.

Chaplains can request an update by contacting the SBC Chaplaincy Team or through their Chaplain portal at mynamb.net. Once started, the chaplain will need to complete an Endorsement Update Application and send proper supporting documents. All endorsed chaplains are required to ensure a current profile and quarterly report is current. A Federal Endorsement update requires SBC Church Membership verification and OER/AER. 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. At least four weeks should be allowed for the update endorsement process to be completed.

Transferring an Endorsement

A chaplain can only be endorsed through one endorsing body. However, a chaplain can change an 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 differs among the various religious ecclesiastical organizations. As a general rule, SBC Chaplaincy provides a 90-day transition period for transfer of endorsement to another religious ecclesiastical body.

Oversight and Supervision

Chaplains serve an institution at that institution's invitation and therefore are under the direct supervision of the institution's supervisory structure. Additionally, 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 SBC Chaplaincy Team members are available to respond to any questions or concerns.

Each applicant submitting an application for denominational endorsement by the Chaplains Commission signs the following agreement to assure the Chaplains Commission of the applicant's understanding, acceptance and willingness to cooperate in carrying out the Commission's policies and purposes. The statement reads:

In making this application, I recognize the Chaplains Commission of the North American Mission Board, SBC, to be the agency designated by the Southern Baptist Convention to endorse chaplains to military and civilian agencies and agree to cooperate with the Chaplains Commission, SBC, in carrying out its policies and programs.²

Discipline and Withdrawal of an SBC Endorsement

In the event that an endorsed chaplain violates a law (local, state, federal, including Uniform Code of Military Justice), agency policy, SBC general expectation, [Chaplaincy Code of Conduct](#), personal or professional ethic, or should there be an embarrassment to the cause of Christ, the SBC or SBC Chaplaincy, disciplinary action may be in order. The Chaplains Commission desires that justice, grace and mercy be exercised in all situations with the goal being personal redemption and restoration. However, withdrawal of endorsement may result from any situation deemed by the Chaplains Commission to warrant such action.

² Statement taken from current SBC Endorsement application.