



Lay Preaching

Formation and Licensure – The Diocese of Mississippi

Overview

Persons in The Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi who seek licensure as lay preachers are required to follow two separate but related tracks, described below:

1. **Formation** and coursework, which may be provided by the A.C. Marble School for Theological Formation; *and*
2. **Licensure** by the Bishop following a process of discernment.

NOTE: Completion of coursework certifies that a person has completed an approved program of study. It does not, however, imply that the person is licensed to preach or that licensure is guaranteed.

Guiding Principles

1. The Bishop licenses lay ministers.
Any license to preach is granted only by the Bishop, according to diocesan policy and the canons of The Episcopal Church.
2. Formation is not the same as authorization.
The Marble School provides theological, biblical, and homiletical formation, but only the Diocese determines whether a person is suitable for licensure.
3. Sponsorship is required.
A person seeking lay preaching formation must have the support of a sponsoring priest, normally the rector, priest-in-charge, or supervising presbyter of the congregation where the person worships and serves.
4. Lay preaching is ecclesial, not merely academic.
A lay preacher must be formed not only in scripture, theology, and homiletics, but also in the discipline of preaching within the worship, doctrine, pastoral life, and authority of the Church.
5. Licensure is contextual and accountable.
A license will specify the scope, duration, and context in which the person is authorized to preach.

Summary of the Formation and Licensure Process

1. The Bishop approves candidates before they enter the Lay Preaching Formation Track as Mississippi candidates.
2. The Marble School provides the required coursework and certifies completion.
3. A sponsoring priest provides local mentoring and supervised preaching opportunities.
4. The Bishop retains full authority over whether a person is licensed.
5. Completion of coursework is treated as *preparation* for possible licensure, not as *entitlement* to licensure.

The Process

1. Initial Discernment in the Congregation

- a. The process begins locally, with conversation among:
 - The person seeking formation;
 - The sponsoring priest or supervising presbyter;
 - The vestry or mission committee.
- b. The sponsoring priest should consider whether the person demonstrates:
 - Faithful participation in the worshiping life of the Church;
 - Maturity of Christian character;
 - Respect for the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church;
 - Capacity for theological learning;
 - Gifts for public communication;
 - Pastoral sensitivity;
 - Willingness to receive correction and supervision.

2. Application to the Bishop

Before entering the Lay Preaching track as a Mississippi candidate, the applicant must receive the Bishop's permission to begin formation. Only the Bishop can authorize a student from the Diocese of Mississippi to enter a Marble School course of formation as preparation for ordination or diocesan licensure.

The application includes:

- A form with sections to be completed both by the applicant and the sponsoring priest;
- A current Spiritual Autobiography (a statement on the steps leading to your decision to seek this license).
- A letter of nomination from the sponsoring priest.
- A letter of endorsement from the applicant's vestry or mission committee.
- A brief description of the applicant's prior theological education or ministry experience.
- Safe Church certification status.
- A recent photograph, at least 2 ½" x 3 ½."

This step ensures that the Bishop is aware of candidates before they begin the program and that coursework is undertaken within a diocesan process of discernment.

3. Admission to the Lay Preaching Formation Track

Once the Bishop approves the applicant to begin formation, the Marble School may admit the person to the Lay Preaching Formation Track.

The current course sequence is:

- Biblical Studies I
- Biblical Studies II
- Theology & Ethics I
- Theology & Ethics II
- Homiletics for Lay Preachers

Additional courses may be required or recommended depending on the candidate's background, the Bishop's expectations, or the needs of the diocese. These requirements may be customized at the Bishop's discretion to meet the needs and expectations of the Diocese of Mississippi.

Possible additions might include:

- Episcopal Church history and polity;
- Liturgics and Prayer Book worship;
- Pastoral theology;
- Anti-racism training;
- Safeguarding/Safe Church training;
- Preaching in particular pastoral contexts.

4. Formation During Coursework

The student is expected to remain in regular supervision and mentoring with the sponsoring priest during the course of study.

In addition to completion of the training requirements, the sponsoring priest or mentor is expected to help the student reflect on:

- The relationship between preaching and the liturgy;
- The pastoral responsibility of proclamation;
- The difference between personal opinion and ecclesial proclamation;
- The use of Scripture in preaching;
- The preacher's accountability to the Church;
- The pastoral needs of the local congregation.

The Marble School will provide academic and formational assessment within the courses. The sponsoring priest will provide local pastoral and ecclesial supervision, including evaluation of supervised preaching and any required practicum work.

5. Supervised Preaching Practice

Before a candidate is recommended for licensure, the candidate is expected to complete a period of supervised preaching.

This includes:

- Preparing sermons under the supervision of the sponsoring priest;
- Preaching in the sponsoring congregation or another approved setting;
- Receiving written and oral feedback;
- Revising sermons in light of feedback;
- Reflecting on the experience of preaching within the liturgy.

The sponsoring priest should evaluate not only delivery, but also:

- Faithfulness to the appointed texts;
- Theological soundness;
- Pastoral judgment;
- Liturgical appropriateness;
- Clarity and coherence;
- Capacity to preach good news rather than merely offer commentary;
- Awareness of the congregation's actual life and needs.

6. Completion of Coursework

At the successful conclusion of the required course sequence approved by the Bishop, the Marble School issues a certificate of completion.

The certificate will state that the student has completed the prescribed coursework for lay preaching formation. It is *not* a license to preach; that can only be issued by the Bishop.

The certificate will state the following (or words to the same effect):

This certifies that [Name] has completed the prescribed course of study in biblical studies, theology and ethics, and homiletics for lay preaching formation through the A.C. Marble School for Theological Formation.

7. Recommendation for Licensure

After completion of coursework and supervised preaching, the sponsoring priest may submit a recommendation to the Bishop.

The recommendation should include:

- Confirmation that the candidate completed the required coursework;
- A summary of the supervised preaching experience;
- An assessment of the candidate's readiness;
- Any limitations or conditions recommended;
- A statement that the sponsoring priest is willing to continue oversight if the license is granted.

The Marble School will also provide a transcript, certificate, or summary of completed coursework as requested.

8. Bishop's Review and Decision

The Bishop then determines whether to license the person as a lay preacher.

The Bishop may choose to:

- Grant the license;
- Grant the license with limitations;
- Require additional formation or supervised practice;
- Delay licensure;
- Decline licensure.

The license will specify:

- The congregation(s) or context in which the person may preach;
- The duration of the license;
- The supervising priest;
- Whether sermons require prior review;
- Any required continuing education;
- The process for renewal.

9. Term and Renewal

Licenses will be issued for a term of three years unless otherwise indicated in the license issued by the Bishop.

Renewal requires:

- A request from the licensed lay preacher;
- A recommendation from the supervising priest;
- Evidence of continued good standing;
- Completion of required continuing education;
- Compliance with Safe Church and diocesan training requirements.

10. Transitional Treatment of Current Students

The following applies for persons already in the program before this process is adopted and honors prior work already completed:

- Persons who have completed the existing coursework may receive a certificate of completion from the Marble School.
- Licensure requires review and approval by the Bishop.
- The Bishop may request a recommendation from the sponsoring priest.
- The Bishop may require additional supervised preaching, diocesan training, or review before licensing.
- Current students who have not completed the program may be folded into the new process at an appropriate point.