

MINISTERIAL CREDENTIALING IN THE EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF AMERICA (EFCA)



I. Rationale for and Benefits of Credentialing

The rationale for and benefits of credentialing are the following:

- A. recognition of God's calling to and gifting for vocational ministry,
- B. interdependency between the local church, the district and the national office, to ensure a commitment to and alignment of beliefs (Statement of Faith) and ethos,
- C. accountability to the local church and to the denomination, both doctrinally and morally,
- D. development educationally and personally, and
- E. confirmed legal status by the IRS (through EFCA).

II. Concept and Scope of Vocational Ministry in Scripture

Scripture clearly teaches that each believer has been given a grace-gift(s) in order to serve our Lord and His Church (Eph.4:7). In addition, some believers have received the call of God upon their lives for vocational ministry and have been given a grace-gift(s) for the task of preparing God's people to carry out the works of service which build up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11,12). It is those in vocational ministry whom God Himself has chosen and appointed, whom the local church affirms, and who are subsequently recognized by the EFCA by the act of the laying on of hands (Acts 13:3, 1 Tim. 4:14, II Tim. 1:6).

III. Authority

- A. The ultimate authority over the credential is the EFCA Conference, with the Board of Ministerial Standing (BOMS) serving as the implementational authority on their behalf.
- B. The Conference has given BOMS the responsibility of carrying out the policies, which is reflected in the structure.
- C. Those credentialed in the EFCA have been approved by a local EFC church, a district council (DBOMS) and the national BOMS. An EFCA credential is a denominational credential and is granted to candidates "in trust." This means the candidate is accountable to the Conference through the local church, and the credential does not belong to the individual.

IV. Requirements for Ministerial Credentials

A. General requirements for candidates serving EFCA Church ministries to be credentialed under the EFCA. A candidate must fulfill the following:

1. Must be a member in good standing of a local EFC church.
2. Must subscribe without mental reservation to the Statement of Faith of the EFCA and agree to reaffirm that conviction every five years.
3. Must be engaged in a vocational or bi-vocational ministry that qualifies for a ministerial credential.
4. Must demonstrate a cooperative spirit with the purposes and policies of the EFCA and a lifestyle consistent with biblical standards of Christian conduct.
5. Must be examined and approved by a DBOMS council or committee under the authority of the Board of Ministerial Standing (BOMS), who gives final approval.
6. Must complete a prescribed course of study on EFCA Church history, theology and polity as directed by BOMS.
7. Must conform to EFCA policy concerning persons with a divorce in their background. The EFCA does not normally issue ministerial credentials to a person who has a divorce in their background. Any person who has been divorced, or who is married to, or anticipates marrying a person who has been divorced, must be granted a Divorce Policy Exception.

B. Requirements for individuals not serving EFCA ministries.

1. Those already credentialed in the EFCA who move to non-EFCA ministries and wish to retain their credentials must fulfill the following four requirements:
 - a. membership in a local EFC church;
 - b. accountability to the District Superintendent (or delegated district staff);
 - c. annual written ministry report to the Director of Biblical Theology and Credentialing (representing the Office of the President); and
 - d. attendance at a district or national conference every other year.

Should they fail to do so, they will be requested to submit their credentials to the Director of Biblical Theology and Credentialing.

2. While we do not normally offer credentials to those who are not serving in the EFCA, BOMS may approve an exception from time to time. Individuals who are serving non-ordaining bodies (some local churches not associated with a denomination and parachurch ministries) may be granted credentials through the EFCA upon meeting the “Requirements for Ministerial Credentials.” They must also fulfill the four requirements listed above (with the possible exception of membership in a local EFC church for those serving in local church ministry).

C. All definitions of language or interpretation of individual cases shall be solely delegated to BOMS.

D. Each credential is the property of the EFCA and is given to the candidate “in trust.”

- E. If one is no longer in a qualifying ministry, the credential must be returned to the Office of the President (OOP) to be placed “in trust for personal reasons.” If one deviates doctrinally from the Statement of Faith, the credential must be returned to the OOP to be placed “in trust” and depending on the determination of BOMS, could be listed as “in trust for disciplinary reasons.” If one experiences a moral failure, the credential must be returned to the OOP to be placed “in trust for disciplinary reasons.”
- F. When a person in good standing turns 65, the individual will be considered retired. This means the individual will no longer need to be in a qualifying ministry or reaffirm the Statement of Faith every five years. This person retains the credential for life unless there is doctrinal deviation from the SOF or moral failure.

V. Types of Ministerial Credentials

There are five types of credentials for ministry issued by the EFCA: Ministry License (Vocational), Certificate of Christian Ministry, Certificate of Ordination, Transfer of Ordination, and Ministry License (Non-Vocational).

In the credentialing process, there are four key matters ascertained of the candidate: calling, character, biblical/ theological (SOF) competency (according to the requirements for the appropriate credential), and pastoral capability.

Credentialing is an important way in which the EFCA comes alongside local church leadership and helps with alignment, doctrinal fidelity, moral purity and accountability of their pastoral staff.

A. Ministry License (Vocational). This credential is designed for those involved in a qualifying ministry and who desire to be aligned with and accountable to the EFCA.

A ministry license may be issued to candidates who are involved in a qualifying ministry. The requirement is that the candidate has the appropriate theological understanding of the Statement of Faith and alignment with the EFCA. Being approved for a license grants the candidate all the rights, privileges and responsibilities of an EFCA credential.

The license is the required credential for all pursuing further credentialing in the EFCA. It is intended, first and foremost, for those directly involved in local church ministry of teaching and preaching the Word and, secondly, for those who are indirectly involved in the ministry of teaching and preaching the Word, who engage in a ministry that is supportive of the ministry of the Word. In addition to pastoral ministries in the local church that are Word based and Word supporting in the local church (e.g., senior pastors, associate pastors, youth pastors, children’s pastors, administrative pastors, pastors of music/worship, etc.), there are others that are also eligible to pursue a license engaged in ministries outside the local church: seminary professors, chaplains, church planters, missionaries [church planters or teachers], institutional ministries, parachurch ministries, etc.

A ministry license will be issued for five years and, thereafter, is renewable (five-year renewable). One is not required to pursue the Certificate of Christian Ministry or the Certificate of Ordination, but can renew the ministry license every five years, in conjunction with the five-year reaffirmation of the Statement of Faith.

The ministry license is also required prior to being granted a Certificate of Christian Ministry or the Certificate of Ordination, which can be pursued within the third year, or anytime thereafter.

A ministry license is valid as long as the holder remains active in a qualifying ministry. If one is no longer in an EFCA qualifying ministry, then the ministry license expires. Should this person re-enter the ministry at a later date, BOMS will request re-examination before returning the credential.

B. Certificate of Christian Ministry (CCM). This credential is designed for qualified individuals serving in local church ministry whose primary ministry is in support of teaching and preaching the Word. It is also fitting for some whose primary ministry is directly related to the ministry of preaching and teaching the Word. In addition to ministries in the local church that are Word supported and Word based (e.g., senior pastors, associate pastors, youth pastors, children's pastors, administrative pastors, pastors of music/worship, etc.), there are others that are also eligible to pursue a CCM engaged in ministries outside the local church: seminary professors, chaplains, church planters, missionaries [church planters or teachers], institutional ministries, parachurch ministries, etc.

1. Requirements for Certificate of Christian Ministry: This credential may be issued to candidates who
 - a. are involved in local church ministry, with some exceptions,
 - b. have been called and gifted for ministry, which has been recognized and affirmed by the local church,
 - c. are within the third year of having been granted a Ministry License, or anytime thereafter,
 - d. have attained the level of theological competency, whether through formal or non-formal means,
 - e. have been approved by a district council (DBOMS) and BOMS, and
 - f. have been publicly and corporately recognized in a church service, in which the service consists of laying on of hands and praying over by the leadership of the local church and the District Superintendent or representative as the credential is presented to the candidate.
2. Preparation for Certificate of Christian Ministry: The candidate for this credential must have a Ministry License, and be within the third year of ministry after obtaining it, or anytime thereafter.
3. Tenure of Certificate of Christian Ministry: The Certificate of Christian Ministry is a bestowal of a trust upon those who are called by God to public ministry. This trust remains with the person as long as he/she continues in ministry and fulfills the standards of ministry as outlined in the pertinent sections above.

An individual who has a Certificate of Christian Ministry can pursue a Certificate of Ordination within the third year, or anytime thereafter, following the requirements for the Certificate of Ordination.

If a person leaves an EFCA ministry or an EFC church and transitions into a **non-EFCA** ministry, the person may retain the EFCA credential.

Should the person leave vocational ministry or cease to be a member in good standing of an EFC church, the certificate must be placed in trust with the EFCA Director of Biblical Theology and Credentialing (representing the Office of the President). Should this person re-enter the ministry at a later date, BOMS may request re-examination before returning the credential.

C. Certificate of Ordination (COO). This credential is designed for qualified males who serve in pastoral ministry in the local church whose primary ministry responsibility is preaching and teaching the Word (e.g., senior pastors, associate pastors, youth pastors, children’s pastors, pastors of music/worship, etc.). There are others that are also eligible to pursue a COO engaged in ministries outside the local church: seminary professors, chaplains, church planters, missionaries [church planters or teachers], institutional ministries, etc.

Ordination in the EFCA was defined by the 1990 Conference in the following way: “Ordination in The Evangelical Free Church of America is the act of publicly setting a person apart for Christian ministry by prayer and the laying on of hands by others in ministry and the leadership of the local church; thus recognizing God’s call upon his life; his gifts and training for ministry; his commitment to teach and preach the sacred Scriptures.”

1. Requirements for Certificate of Ordination. This credential may be issued to male candidates who
 - a. are involved in local church ministry, with some exceptions,
 - b. have been called and gifted for ministry, which has been recognized and affirmed by the local church,
 - c. are within the third year of having been granted a Ministry License, or anytime thereafter,
 - d. have attained the level of theological proficiency, whether through formal or non-formal means,
 - e. have been approved by a district council (DBOMS) and BOMS, and
 - f. have been publicly and corporately recognized in a church service, in which the service consists of laying on of hands and praying over by the leadership of the local church and the District Superintendent or representative as the credential is presented to the candidate.
2. Preparation for Ordination: The candidate for this credential must have a Ministry License, and be within the third year of ministry after obtaining it, or anytime thereafter.
3. Tenure of Ordination: The Certificate of Ordination is the bestowal of a trust upon those who are called by God to public ministry. This trust remains with the person as long as he continues in ministry and fulfills the standards of ministry as outlined in the pertinent sections above.

If a person leaves an EFCA ministry or an EFC church and transitions into a **non-EFCA** ministry, the person may retain the EFCA credential.

Should the person leave vocational ministry or cease to be a member in good standing of an EFC church, the certificate must be placed in trust with the EFCA Director of Biblical Theology and Credentialing (representing the Office of the President). Should this person re-enter the ministry at a later date, BOMS may request re-examination before returning the credential.

D. Transfer of Ordination (TOO). This credential is designed for qualified males who serve in pastoral ministry in the local church whose primary ministry responsibility is preaching and teaching the Word (e.g., senior pastors, associate pastors, youth pastors, children’s pastors, pastors of music/worship, etc.), and who have a valid Ordination from another ordaining denomination or local church.

Transferring one’s ordination to the EFCA reflects an alignment with and a commitment to the EFCA theology and ethos. It also puts one under the authority of and makes one accountable to the EFCA.

1. Requirements for Transfer of Ordination: A candidate seeking a transfer of ordination to the EFCA shall meet the “Requirements for Ministerial Credentials” (from the first page of this document). This credential may be issued to male candidates who
 - a. are involved in local church ministry, with some exceptions,
 - b. have been called and gifted for ministry, which has been recognized and affirmed by the local church,
 - c. have been in ministry in the EFCA one year,
 - d. have attained the level of theological proficiency, whether through formal and/or non-formal means, and
 - e. have been approved by a DBOMS council and BOMS.
2. Preparation for the Transfer of Ordination: The candidate for this credential must have an ordination from another ordaining body or a local church, and be able to provide the written paper, minutes and council decision for his ordination. An EFCA Ministry License is not a prerequisite.
3. Tenure of Transfer of Ordination: The Transfer of Ordination is the bestowal of a trust upon those who are called by God to public ministry. This trust remains with the person as long as he continues in ministry and fulfills the standards of ministry as outlined in the pertinent sections above.

If a person leaves an EFCA ministry or an EFC church and transitions into a non-EFCA ministry, the person may retain the EFCA credential.

Should the person leave the ministry or cease to be a member in good standing of an EFC church, the certificate must be placed in trust with the EFCA Director of Biblical Theology and Credentialing (representing the Office of the President). Should this person re-enter the ministry at a later date, BOMS may request re-examination before returning the credential.

E. Ministry License (Non-Vocational). This credential is designed specifically for those who are serving in a non-vocational ministry who require a credential to serve in that capacity (e.g., some chaplaincies, marketplace ministries, etc.). The candidate must meet the requirements set forth in “Requirements for Ministerial Credentials” (A., with the exception of 3,” must be engaged in a vocational or bi-vocational ministry”). The holder of this License may qualify for legal status to perform the ministries and functions of the pastor/teacher.

This license is valid for five years and is renewable for as long as the holder remains in active, non-vocational ministry. It does not lead to either the Certificate of Christian Ministry or the Certificate of Ordination.

If a person with a ministry license serving in a non-vocational ministry transitions into a vocational ministry, BOMS may request re-examination before transitioning to the ministry license (vocational).

VI. Process, Policies, Procedures and Accountability

- A. The specific process, policies and procedures pertaining to credentialing in the EFCA will be determined and implemented by BOMS, under the authority of the Conference.
- B. A credentials update will be given to the delegates during regularly scheduled Conferences.

Board of Ministerial Standing, April 30, 2013