

CREDENTIALING PROCESS

Every Christian disciple has a ministry, and all who are called to ministry should be accountable. Ministerial credentialing, however, relates to particular vocational calls and carries with it both recognition and accountability. Credentials are covenantal; to accept such credentials is to become accountable to the established credentialing body of the appropriate area assembly. While most ministries reserved for the laity of the church do not require formal recognition as a means of establishing accountability, ministries practiced by clergy persons usually do.

Credentialing in the Church of God movement may take the form of ordination, licensing, or commissioning. Each requires that certain qualifications be met for ministry requirements and accountability. It is the responsibility of the appropriate credentialing body to determine whether or not a minister is qualified for credentialing, and if so, when and at what level.

Evidence of certain spiritual prerequisites may be required by a credentialing committee in order for a prospective ministerial candidate to initiate pursuit of appropriate credentials. Such prerequisites include, but are not limited to:

- Salvation - as evidenced by a holy lifestyle
- Evidence of the call of God - a divine appointment to Christian ministry
- A demonstrated need for vocational credentials
- Fellowship and involvement in a local congregation of the Church of God movement
- Demonstrated knowledge and understanding through use of the Bible Content Discovery Survey

Because there are varieties of ministry, there are varieties of credentialing. Those who are ordained, licensed, or commissioned receive such certification because they have been “set apart” for a ministry that requires a more extensive involvement and a special gifting by the Holy Spirit.

Credentialing at whatever level signifies a covenant relationship between...

the minister and the credentialing body,
the minister and ministerial peers,
the minister and the church at large,
the minister and the local church being served, and
the minister and God.

Assuring the integrity of each of these covenant relationships rests on patterns of mutual accountability (*Credentials Manual of the Church of God, 2007 revised edition, pp. 14-15*).

COMMISSION:

The purpose of commissioning is to recognize and support one who articulates a sense of call to ministry. It grants a preliminary ministerial status and inclusion on the approved list. Credentialing bodies may commission a person for terms of one or two years, at their discretion, depending on circumstances and the qualifications. Terms are renewable as the credentialing committee may judge appropriate.

A commission is given on the condition of an annual review by the credentialing body. It may be voided by action of the credentialing body if deemed advisable. It may be renewed so long as the credentialing body judges the minister worthy of such continuing credentialing. Being commissioned does not necessarily imply that the candidate eventually will be licensed and/or ordained (*Credentials Manual of the Church of God, 2007 revised edition, p. 15*).

LICENSING:

Licensing is a second level of credentialing, one that acknowledges a minister’s call to the Christian ministry and a corresponding commitment to vocational involvement. Licensing affords a limited measure of recognition and accountability. While it may serve as a step toward ordination, licensing should not be viewed as the promise of

ordination. Licensing often satisfies legal requirements, as well as requirements imposed by such institutions as hospitals, nursing homes, and jails when these provide opportunities for pastoral care.

Credentialing bodies may license ministers for terms of one or two years, at their discretion, depending on circumstances and the qualifications of the minister. A license is given on the condition of an annual review by the credentialing body. It may be voided by action of the credentialing body if deemed advisable. It may be renewed if the credentialing body judges the minister worthy of such continuing credentialing (*Credentials Manual of the Church of God, 2007 revised edition*, pp. 15-16).

ORDINATION:

Ordination, the final step of vocational credentialing, recognizes a minister's call and vocational commitment to the Christian ministry. It provides for accountability to the appropriate credentialing body and also satisfies certain legal requirements of the state or province. Ordination usually is needed by persons who serve as leaders of local congregations, in institutional ministries, missionary endeavors, and certain other formal capacities. Ordination is to be granted only when it is strategic to performance of vocational ministry to which one is called, and when its recipient is found suitable for ordination by virtue of divine call, appropriate character, spirit, commitment, preparation, beliefs, and performance (*Credentials Manual of the Church of God, 2007 revised edition*, p. 16).

QUALIFICATIONS FOR CREDENTIALING VOCATIONAL CHRISTIAN MINISTERS:

Credentialing vocational Christian ministers occurs at three levels. Such credentialing must always rest on the condition that certain personal and professional expectations have been met. Indiscriminate credentialing practices only bring reproach on the ministry and harm to the church. The credentialing body, therefore, must be aware of the essential qualifications that give evidence of a person's fitness for Christian ministry, and know how to determine that a candidate possesses these qualifications.

The crucial qualifications for vocational ministry are divided into six categories. No one of these should be considered less essential than another. To be unqualified in even one area is to be unqualified for the ministry and hence, for vocational credentialing.

1. **The Motivational Qualification** - Credentialing is for those who are inwardly convinced that God has singled them out for vocational Christian ministry.
2. **The Moral and Ethical Qualification** - Credentialing is for those whose character and reputation are worthy of Christian ministers.
3. **The Theological and Biblical Qualification** - Credentialing is for those who possess a well-developed and scripturally valid belief system and whose lives give indication of the assimilation of that belief system.
4. **The Dispositional and Relational Qualification** - Credentialing is for those whose personal disposition is consistently in keeping with that expected of a representative of Jesus Christ and the Church.
5. **The Educational Qualification** - Credentialing is for those who are committed to adequate education for the ministerial profession.
6. **The Vocational Qualification** - Credentialing is for those who are peers in position and performance of those who are vocationally or bi-vocationally engaged in the professional Christian ministry.

(*Credentials Manual of the Church of God, 2007 revised edition*, segments from pp. 21-29)