



Pastor Under EFCA Discipline

A Handbook of Information

Preface

The Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) operates within a congregational form of church government. The local congregation calls and cares for its pastoral staff. However, EFCA policy calls for the EFCA Board of Ministerial Standing (BOMS) to administer the process of granting ministerial credentials. The Board of Ministerial Standing is also responsible to administer the discipline process of those serving with EFCA ministerial credentials.

The discipline of those with ministerial credentials must be undertaken with special care to protect both the accuser and the accused. Discipline also seeks to protect the purity and the witness of the local congregation. The Word of God places an emphasis on restoration as one of the desired outcomes of discipline.

The EFCA is committed to assist those who have been placed under discipline. By God's grace we seek to bring personal recovery, reconciliation with others and the restoration of the ministerial credential. We acknowledge situations will arise in which it is either unlikely or not possible to complete every phase of the process.

The BOMS retains the authority to oversee these matters. The final decision to place a pastor under discipline or to grant the restoration of a ministerial credential belongs to the BOMS.

Section 1 – Levels of Discipline

There are levels of offense within the EFCA's discipline policy.

1. **Level 1:** The offense was unintentional, the effect minimal, or arose because of poor judgment on the part of the pastor...
 - 1.1. A letter expressing concern and care will be sent to the pastor by the District Superintendent or the BOMS.
 - 1.2. It is expected that confession, repentance, and attempts to reconcile will occur.
 - 1.3. The elders, the District Superintendent or the BOMS may require the pastor to receive designated training or counseling.
2. **Level 2:** The offense was clearly inappropriate or intentional on the part of the accused, but the offense and consequence is considered to be relatively minor...

- 2.1. A written reprimand will be issued to the pastor by the District Superintendent or the BOMS. A copy of the written reprimand will be placed in the credential file of the pastor.
 - 2.2. It is expected that confession, repentance and attempts to reconcile will take place.
 - 2.3. The District Superintendent may recommend to the local church or the BOMS may require a temporary suspension from ministry with pay in order to receive counseling or address issues of concern.
3. **Level 3:** The offense was clearly inappropriate, intentional, and persistent resulting in, or could have resulted in, serious harm to others...
- 3.1. BOMS will declare the pastor to be under discipline by the EFCA. This pastor is required to return his or her ministerial credential to the EFCA to be “placed in trust for the purpose of discipline”. The credential and all written documents will be placed in the credential file of the pastor.
 - 3.2. A report that the pastor’s credential has been “placed in trust for the purpose of discipline” will be included in the annual report of the EFCA.
 - 3.3. A process for personal recovery, reconciliation with others and the potential restoration of the credential will be offered to the pastor.
 - 3.4. If at any point in the process of discipline, recovery, and restoration the BOMS determines that the return of the credential is unlikely or not allowed by current policies of the EFCA, the BOMS will inform the pastor of that decision.

Section 2 – Recovery and Restoration

The EFCA has stated its commitment to help those who have been placed under discipline. Of primary concern is the personal recovery of the pastor and the immediate family. The EFCA also desires to see its process lead to a pastor being released from being under discipline. However, the opportunity to serve in ministry with an EFCA ministerial credential is not a right that can be demanded and the restoration of a ministerial credential to someone who has been placed under discipline is not guaranteed to anyone. The care of the wounded local congregation and other individuals is also of concern but not specifically addressed in this handbook. There are five steps to the process.

1. Personal Recovery

- 1.1. A pastor seeking to be released from being under discipline is expected to begin the process by taking time for personal recovery. There are three options available. The first two options are preferred by the BOMS.
 - 1.1.1. Through participation in the EFCA recovery church ministry.
 - 1.1.2. Through a recovery process established within the church the pastor was serving.
 - 1.1.3. Through alternate arrangements approved by the EFCA Pastoral Care Ministries (PCM) and the BOMS.
- 1.2. Progress is to be reported as requested to PCM and the BOMS.

2. Repentance and Attempts to Reconcile

- 2.1. Repentance and reconciliation are an integral part of personal recovery.
- 2.2. A pastor under discipline seeking to return to ministry with a ministerial credential is required to demonstrate an ongoing attitude of repentance and be open to attempts to reconcile with those affected by the situation.
- 2.3. Reconciliation takes time and an attempt to reconcile cannot be forced on others. However, the recovery and restoration process does not stop if genuine reconciliation is not extended to the pastor by others.
- 2.4. Recovery Church team leader(s) and the leaders of PCM and the BOMS, in consultation with others involved, will guide the process of reconciliation. Reconciliation may need to take place with individuals and local congregations.
- 2.5. A report of reconciliation efforts and their results will be recorded and placed in the pastor's credential file by those monitoring the recovery process.

3. Release from Discipline

- 3.1. EFCA policy requires that a minimum of two years must elapse before the BOMS can release a pastor from being under discipline.
- 3.2. A pastor initiates a request to be released from being under discipline by contacting the District Superintendent or the leaders of PCM and the BOMS. A

review of the pastor's personal recovery, attitude of repentance and attempts to reconcile, and other relevant concerns will take place.

- 3.3. Components of the process to be reviewed should include:
 - 3.3.1. Recovery – Is the pastor and the whole family ready to be on their own again?
 - 3.3.2. Counseling – Has the pastor gained adequate insight into the issues that led to the loss of the ministerial credential and taken corrective action?
 - 3.3.3. Accountability – Has the pastor gained a stronger sense of personal accountability (integrity) and have others expressed greater confidence in the adequacy of the pastor's accountability relationships (reputation)?
 - 3.3.4. Reconciliation – How successful were the efforts to reconcile with individuals and local congregations?
 - 3.3.5. Incorporation into the life of a local congregation? – Has the pastor been active in the life of a local congregation and entrusted with approved ministry opportunities?
- 3.4. Upon a satisfactory review of the process, the District Superintendent and/or the leader of PCM makes a recommendation to the BOMS to release the pastor from being under discipline.
- 3.5. The BOMS will act upon the request to release the pastor from being under discipline. If there are restrictions regarding future ministry opportunities or other concerns, these will be noted by the BOMS in its decision. It is expected that the pastor will abide by those restrictions.
- 3.6. If a release from discipline is granted, the pastor will be notified personally and in writing of the decision. A copy of the written notice will be placed in the credential file of the pastor.
- 3.7. A public or private service celebration the release from discipline is appropriate but optional.
- 3.8. A report that the pastor's credential has changed from "placed in trust for the purpose of discipline" to the credentials "placed in trust for personal reasons" will be included in the annual report of the EFCA.

4. Return to Ministry

- 4.1. If there are no restrictions or other concerns as to future ministry placed on the pastor by the BOMS, the pastor is free to pursue appropriate ministry opportunities.
- 4.2. If there are restrictions or other concerns as to future ministry placed on the pastor by the BOMS, the pastor is to seek approval of the leaders of PCM and the BOMS before seeking or accepting a ministry opportunity.

5. Restoration of the Credential

- 5.1. Upon accepting a call to serve in a qualified ministry the pastor may request the return of the ministerial credential.
- 5.2. Since the returning of a ministerial credential is the final step in the complete discipline and restoration process, the BOMS shall be notified and must approve the return of the pastor's ministerial credential. Written notice of the restoration of the credential will be placed in credential file of the pastor.
- 5.3. The report of the restoration of the ministerial credential will be included in the annual report of the EFCA.