

STEPS  
TOWARD  
CREDENTIALING



EFCA

MULTIPLYING HEALTHY CHURCHES  
AMONG ALL PEOPLE

For further information write:

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The Evangelical Free Church of America  
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Minneapolis, MN 55420-1300

January 2000

## REVISIONS AS OF 12/00

Note item: III. A. 3. *It will now read:* Must be engaged in a ministry that qualifies for a ministerial credential. (Minimum of 30 hours per week.)

Note item: III. A. 5. *It will now read:* Must be examined and approved by an ordination council or committee under the authority of the district.

Note item: III. A. 6. *It will now read:* Must complete a prescribed course of study, Free Church history, doctrine and polity as directed by the Board of Ministerial Standing.

Note item: IV. A. 1. (3). *It will now read:* have demonstrated an acceptable level of academic preparation for ministry, such as completion of an M.Div. degree or its equivalent from an approved evangelical school; (unless an exception is made by the Board of Ministerial Standing in recognition of the candidate's knowledge and experience);

Note item V. B. 1. *Add the statement:* The Urban Intercultural Mission, Board of Ministerial Standing, and the District should work together to provide the number of pastors in the candidate's language to fulfill this requirement.

Note item V. B. 2. *Add the statement:* The Urban Intercultural Mission will be responsible for arranging for a transcript/translation of a candidate's documents when in another language.

## MINISTERIAL CREDENTIALING IN THE EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF AMERICA

Rules and Regulations  
for Ministerial Credentials in  
The Evangelical Free Church of America

### *I. Purpose of Ministerial Credentials*

The purpose of a ministerial credential is (1) to affirm God's call upon a person's life; (2) to verify that this person meets the qualifications and standards for ministry in The Evangelical Free Church of America; (3) to approve this person for ministerial service under the auspices of The Evangelical Free Church of America; and (4) to provide legal status in the exercise of that person's ministry.

### *II. The Concept and Scope of Ministry in Scripture*

Scripture clearly teaches that each believer has been given a "gift" or "grace" in order to serve our Lord and His Church (Eph.4:7). In addition, however, some believers have received the call of God upon their lives for vocational ministry and have been given ministry gifts commensurate with 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 this group which God Himself has chosen and appointed and which the Church seeks to recognize by the act of the laying on of hands (Acts 13:3, 1 Tim. 4:14, II Tim. 1:6).

### *III. Requirements for Ministerial Credentials*

#### **A. General requirements for candidates serving Free Church ministries to be credentialed under The Evangelical Free Church of America.**

A candidate:

1. Must be a member in good standing of a local Evangelical Free Church.
2. Must subscribe without mental reservation to the Statement of Faith of The Evangelical Free Church of America and agree to reaffirm that commitment every five years.
3. Must be engaged in a full-time ministry (minimum of 30 hours per week) that qualifies for a ministerial credential.
4. Must demonstrate a cooperative spirit with the purposes and policies of The Evangelical Free Church of America and a lifestyle consistent with biblical standards of Christian conduct.
5. Must be examined and approved by a district ordination council or committee.
6. Must complete the prescribed course on Free Church history, doctrine and polity as directed by The Evangelical Free Church of America.
7. Must conform to Evangelical Free Church policy concerning persons with a divorce in their background. The Evangelical Free Church of America 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 Free Church ministries.**

While we do not normally offer credentials to ministers who are not serving in the Free Church, the Board of Ministerial Standing<sup>1</sup> may approve an exception from time to time. Individuals who are serving non-ordaining bodies may be granted credentials through The Evangelical Free Church of America upon meeting the general requirements as set forth above (with the possible exception of membership in a local Free Church) and the specific requirements in Section IV.

In addition they are required to: (1) report on their status annually in writing to the President's office; (2) maintain an accountable relationship with the superintendent of the district in which they reside; (3) attend the Free Church Ministerial Institute, a district conference or the General Conference at least once every other year. Those already credentialed in the Free Church who move to non-Free Church ministries and wish to retain their credentials must fulfill the same requirements. Should they fail to do so, they will be requested to surrender their credentials.

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<sup>1</sup>The Board of Ministerial Standing shall consist of: (a) a chairman, who shall be a widely-respected pastor with a strong history in the EFCA, nominated by the Board of Directors and elected by the Conference for a term of three years; (b) the president of the EFCA; (c) the executive vice president of the EFCA; (d) the vice president or other executive with primary responsibility for ministerial matters; (e) the president of Trinity International University or another officer of Trinity International University designated by its president; (f) the chairman of the EFCA Ministerial Association; (g) four mature

pastors nominated by the Nominating Committee (in consultation with the Board of the EFCA Ministerial Association) and elected by the Conference for a term of three years; (h) one tenured professor in the biblical studies or theology department of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, nominated by the Board of Directors and elected by the Conference for a term of three years; and (i) four district superintendents nominated by the Board of Directors (in consultation with the Council of Superintendents) and elected by the Conference for a term of three years. The terms of the members elected under subparagraphs g, h and i shall be organized in such a manner that the terms of three of those members expire each year.

- C. Specific requirements for each kind of credential are set forth in Article IV.
- D. All definitions of language or interpretation of individual cases shall be solely delegated to the Board of Ministerial Standing.
- E. Each credential is the property of The Evangelical Free Church of America and is given to the candidate "in trust."

#### *IV. Types of Ministerial Credentials*

There are four types of credentials for ministry issued by The Evangelical Free Church of America: Certificate of Ordination, Certificate of Christian Ministry, Ministry License and Recommendation for Ministry.

- A. **Certificate of Ordination.** This credential is designed specifically for those involved in pastoral ministry.
  - 1. Requirements for Ordination: The ordination credential may be issued to candidates who (1) are male in gender; (2) are involved in pastoral ministry (seminary professors, military chaplains and missionary church planters are also eligible); (3) have completed an M.Div.

degree or its equivalent in an evangelical seminary (unless an exception is made by the Board of Ministerial Standing in recognition of the candidate's knowledge and experience); (4) have completed the requirements for a ministerial license; (5) have been approved by an examining council; and (6) have demonstrated gifts in ministry to the satisfaction of the Board of Ministerial Standing.

- 2. Preparation for Ordination: The candidate for ordination must have held a ministry license for one full licensing period of three years in The Evangelical Free Church of America. (This requirement may be waived in certain situations for military chaplains who are assured a chaplain's appointment.)
- 3. Tenure of Ordination: 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 Sections I, II, and III. Should the person leave the ministry or cease to be a member in good standing of an Evangelical Free Church, he must place his ordination in trust with The Evangelical Free Church of America. Should he re-enter the ministry at a later date, the Board of Ministerial Standing may request re-examination before returning the credential.
- 4. Transfer of Ordination: An evangelical minister seeking transfer of ordination to The Evangelical Free Church of America shall meet the same qualifications and follow the same procedure as set forth in Sections III and IV, except that he need not go through the licensing procedure. The applicant shall seek to supply a letter of recommendation from some official or board of his previous affiliation. He must be a member of an Evangelical Fre

Church and must have served one year with The Evangelical Free Church of America before the transfer of ordination can be completed. An applicant not serving a Free Church as pastor and wishing to transfer his ordination must be a member in good standing of a local Evangelical Free Church for at least one year.

**B. Certificate of Christian Ministry.** This credential is designed specifically for those involved in professional church ministries other than pastoral ministry.

1. Requirements for Certificate of Christian Ministry: This credential may be issued to candidates who (1) are involved in church ministry (such as associate/assistant pastor, administrative pastor, youth pastor, minister of music, pastoral counselor, women's minister, children's minister, etc.), institutional ministry, military chaplaincy, missionary ministry and evangelistic ministry; (2) have completed an appropriate degree for their area of ministry from a recognized college or seminary (unless an exception is made by the Board of Ministerial Standing in recognition of the candidate's knowledge and experience); (3) have completed the requirements of a ministerial license; (4) have been approved by an examining council; and (5) have demonstrated gifts in ministry to the satisfaction of the Board of Ministerial Standing.
2. Preparation for Certificate of Christian Ministry: The candidate for this credential must have held a ministry license for one full licensing period of three years in The Evangelical Free Church of America. (This requirement may be waived in certain situa-

tions for military chaplains who are assured a chaplain's appointment.)

3. Tenure of Certificate of Christian Ministry: An EFCA credential 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 Sections I, II and III. Should the person leave the ministry, he/she must place his/her certificate in trust with The Evangelical Free Church of America. Should he/she re-enter the ministry at a later date, the Board of Ministerial Standing may request re-examination before returning the credential.

**C. Ministry License.** This credential is designed specifically for those who are preparing for a permanent credential but have not yet fulfilled the requirements.

A ministry license is valid only as long as the holder remains active in the kind of ministry for which the license was issued. It will be issued for three years and, thereafter, one year at a time until a permanent credential is obtained (up to two additional years).

1. License Leading to Certificate of Ordination. A license may be issued to candidates who are involved in pastoral ministry (seminary professors, military chaplains and missionary church planters are also eligible). The applicant for this ministry license must be male in gender. During the licensing period, the candidate will have all the rights and privileges of ordination.
2. License Leading to Certificate of Christian Ministry. A ministry license may be issued to candidates who are involved in church ministry (such as associate/assistant pastor,

administrative pastor, youth pastor, minister of music, pastoral counselor, women's minister, children's minister, etc.), institutional ministry, military chaplaincy, missionary ministry and evangelistic ministry. The one who holds this credential will have the same rights and privileges as the one holding the Certificate of Christian Ministry. It does not carry the ordination title and does not lead to ordination. (While this credential is available to the above mentioned ministry positions, it does not exclude some serving in these positions from pursuing the ordination track if they are otherwise qualified).

**D. Recommendation for Ministry.** This credential is designed specifically for certain lay ministers and student ministers.

This license is valid for three years and is renewable for as long as the holder remains in active ministry, but it does not lead to a permanent certificate.

1. Lay Ministry License. A certificate may be issued to male lay workers who are members in good standing of a local Evangelical Free Church congregation and who are engaged in pastoral ministry. The holder of this credential may qualify for legal status to perform the ministries and functions of the pastor/teacher.
2. Student Ministry License. A certificate may be issued to male theological students who are carrying out pastor/teacher functions in the local church. (This is not intended for internships unless the candidate is serving as a senior pastor.) The holder of this credential may qualify for legal status to perform the ministries and functions of the pastor/teacher.

## ***V. Procedures in Applying for Ministerial Credentials***

- A. A candidate desiring a credential from The Evangelical Free Church of America shall make written application to the superintendent of the district in which he is serving and shall submit the following:
  1. A letter outlining the reasons he or she needs and desires a ministerial credential.
  2. A letter of recommendation from both the local church he or she is serving and the Evangelical Free church of which the applicant is a member indicating support of the applicant's ministry and recognition of the applicant's gifts of ministry.
  3. A letter of recommendation from colleges, universities and seminaries he or she has attended.
- B. The district superintendent shall arrange an appropriate time and council at which the candidate for a ministerial credential can be examined.
  1. For permanent credentials, a minimum of five pastors and five laymen from five Evangelical Free churches must be present to constitute the council. No more than three voting members of the council may be from the pastor's church. In some instances, local districts may elect permanent credentialing councils as their chosen method of examination, but these councils shall also meet the above criteria. For other credentials (Ministry License or Recommendation for Ministry) the composition of the council will be determined by the district.
  2. The candidate will present a written document setting forth his conversion, call to ministry, doctrine, polity, lifestyle and views on practical issues.

3. The members of the council shall thoroughly examine the candidate. Comprehensive minutes of the examination shall be made to be submitted to the Board of Ministerial Standing.
  4. Upon completion of the examination, the council shall go into executive session. Each member shall be polled as to his or her decision relative to the candidate. A three-fourths vote of the examining council is necessary to recommend the candidate to the national Board of Ministerial Standing which has the final authority to grant a credential.
- C. It must be clearly understood that it will take a minimum of 45 days after the complete file is received at the President's Office to process the license or ordination. No ordination service should be scheduled until final approval is received from the Board of Ministerial Standing.
- D. A public service setting the person aside for ministry must be held for first-time ordinations but is optional for others. This service should include the laying on of hands by the leadership of the district and the local church and the presentation of the ordination credential to the candidate.
- E. Exceptions Regarding Ordination: The normal procedure for all candidates moving toward ordination requires at least three years or one year in the case of a transfer of ordination. In certain circumstances a waiver of that period can be obtained by petitioning the President's Office of The Evangelical Free Church of America. The Board of Ministerial Standing will evaluate the reasons and determine whether an exception and waiver should be given.

## ***VI. Credentials of Those Retiring from Active Ministry***

Those retiring from active ministry at 60 years of age or older, or those who are permanently disabled, may retain their ministerial credential so long as they shall be found living and teaching in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and remain under the authority of the EFCA.

## ***VII. Suspension and Revocation of Ministerial Credentials***

- A. The basis for suspension and revocation.
1. A person credentialed by The Evangelical Free Church of America whose conduct is unbecoming a servant of Jesus Christ, as determined by the Board of Ministerial Standing, shall voluntarily surrender his or her credential. If the individual refuses, the credential shall be suspended by the Board of Ministerial Standing.
  2. A person who teaches contrary to the doctrinal statement, principles or practices of The Evangelical Free Church of America, as determined by the Board of Ministerial Standing, shall voluntarily surrender his or her credential. If the individual refuses, the credential shall be suspended by the Board of Ministerial Standing.
  3. A person credentialed by The Evangelical Free Church of America who experiences a divorce, or who marries a person who has been divorced, shall voluntarily surrender his or her credential to the Board of Ministerial Standing which shall review the circumstances of the divorce in accordance with the policies on divorce and remarriage adopted by the General

Conference to determine whether a Divorce Policy Exception should be granted. If he or she refuses, the credential shall be suspended by the Board of Ministerial Standing.

4. A person credentialed by The Evangelical Free Church of America who is involved in a church split or who becomes involved in another church within the ministry area of the former church without the express approval of the governing board of the former church shall have his or her ministry reviewed and will have his or her credential suspended by the Board of Ministerial Standing. If he or she refuses, the credential shall be suspended by the Board of Ministerial Standing.
5. A person who is no longer engaged in a qualifying ministry or who is no longer a member in good standing of an Evangelical Free Church, but who refuses to put his or her credential in trust, will have the credential suspended by the Board of Ministerial Standing.

B. The procedure for suspension and revocation.

1. An accusation against a credentialed person must first be presented in writing to the district superintendent or the board of the district where the accused resides or serves or where the alleged deviation took place. The President's Office and the Board of Ministerial Standing of The Evangelical Free Church of America shall be notified by the district superintendent regarding the accusations.
2. The superintendent and/or district board shall carefully investigate the charges. If in their opinion the charges have sufficient merit, a recommendation shall be made to the Board of Ministerial Standing, that the credential of the accused be placed in trust, accompanied by a

written copy of the charges. If the accused refuses to cooperate with the investigative procedures established by the district board, his or her credential shall be suspended by the Board of Ministerial Standing. However, if the accused cooperates with the investigative procedures, he or she must be given the right to state his or her case to the district board or its designated body before a recommendation is made to the Board of Ministerial Standing.

3. Should the district board uphold the charges and recommend the suspension of the credential, the accused shall have the right to appeal his or her case to the Board of Ministerial Standing at his or her own expense.
4. If the charges are sustained by the Board of Ministerial Standing, the accused shall have the right to appeal his or her case to the General Conference. Such appeal must be in writing and must be addressed to the General Secretary of the Conference.
5. If the General Conference sustains the charges or if at any point along the way the accused chooses not to contest the charges or to seek restoration, the suspended credential shall be revoked.
6. The Board of Ministerial Standing shall notify the Ministerial Association of revocation of the credential so that proper action can be taken to exclude that person from membership. The governing body of the local church or organization served, if any, shall also be notified.
7. The announcement of suspension or revocation of the credential shall be published in the Yearbook of The Evangelical Free Church of America.

Further details regarding Discipline Procedures are found in the document, *The Discipline and*

*Restoration of Credentialed Leaders in The Evangelical Free Church of America, Article III.*

### ***VIII. Restoration of Ministerial Credentials***

- A. A person credentialed by The Evangelical Free Church of America who has had his or her credential suspended or revoked for conduct unbecoming a servant of Jesus Christ may seek a restoration of the credential by the following process:
1. A minimum time span of two years must have elapsed before restoration can be considered.
  2. A spirit of contrition and repentance must be manifested.
  3. Where others have been defrauded, a full and complete restitution must have been attempted.
  4. Healing and restoration of broken relationships, to the extent possible, must be established and verified.
  5. A proper program of treatment and therapy must be undertaken where recommended.
  6. Recommendations for restoration and reinstatement must be received from the district superintendent, from the district board (or other examining committee established by the district), from a competent counselor and from other valid witnesses who can attest to the completeness of the subject's personal recovery.
  7. As these requirements and qualifications are fulfilled, the request for reinstatement may be made through the district to the Office of the President of the EFCA and the Board of Ministerial Standing. Should the request be granted, proper notification in writing will be made to the minister, his district superintendent, the Ministerial Association and any local churches served by the minister and/or affected by the decision.

8. If report of the suspension and/or revocation was made in the EFCA Yearbook, report of the restoration shall also be made.
- B. If disciplinary action was taken due to teaching that is contrary to the doctrinal statement, principles or practices of The Evangelical Free Church of America or due to actions resulting in a church split, a request for restoration must go through the district superintendent and the district board before coming to the Board of Ministerial Standing. Cases will be decided on an individual basis, and proper notification in writing will be made to the minister, the district superintendent, the Ministerial Association and any local churches served by the minister and/or affected by the decision.