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GENERAL CONFERENCE STANDARDS FOR MINISTERIAL CREDENTIALS

The General Conference recognizes four (4) credentials for ministry:

1. Ordination
2. Annual License
3. Five (5) Year Renewable License
4. Lay License

ALL CREDENTIALS

Every person granted credentials for ministry on any level by the Churches of God must:

1. Be a believer in and a disciple of Jesus Christ.
2. Have been baptized as a believer and participate in the Lord's Supper and Footwashing.
3. Have received God's call to the ministry for which credentials will be granted.
4. Demonstrate the presence of the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit needed for ministry.
5. Demonstrate preparedness for ministry appropriate to the credentials being issued as defined by the *Readiness for Ministry* document of the Churches of God, General Conference.
6. Be a member of a local congregation of the Churches of God.
7. Cooperate with and be subject to the authority and standards of the local conference/eldership and General Conference of the Churches of God. Failure to cooperate with and be subject to the local conference/eldership or the General Conference may result in the recall of credentials following due process.
8. Demonstrate compatibility with the current official doctrinal statement of the Churches of God, General Conference.

ORDINATION

Ordination is the standard credential for ministry in the Churches of God. It signifies that the ordained person is fully qualified and authorized to perform all pastoral duties and offices. It is valid for the lifetime of the ordained person unless surrendered or recalled following due process by the conference/eldership in which ordination is currently held.

1. Every person ordained by the Churches of God must:
 - A. Have been a member of a local congregation of the Churches of God, General Conference for at least three (3) years immediately prior to ordination.
 - B. Have completed an approved course of academic preparation as described below, including courses on the polity, history and doctrine of the Churches of God, General Conference.
 - C. Be available for appointment, by the conference/eldership conferring ordination, to a full-time¹ assignment as a pastor or be placed full time in another ministry approved by the conferring conference/eldership.

¹ "Full-time" means "working in the pastoral ministry as ones only employment and career." Further definition of this term is left to each local conference/eldership.

An exception to this requirement may be granted by the conferring conference/eldership in order to meet special needs (such as a tentmaker ministry in a mission church or lack of full-time positions).

- D. Have on file with the sponsoring commission a letter of recommendation from the local church in which membership is held.
 - E. Have been recommended for ordination by the appropriate commission of the conferring conference/eldership.
 - F. Have been approved for ordination by the conferring conference/eldership and ordained under the authority of that body in a special service provided for that purpose.
 - G. Have completed at least one year of pastoral experience following the completion of academic preparation.
2. The standard academic preparation for ordination for persons of all ages is a Bachelor's degree from an undergraduate institution and a Master of Divinity degree from a seminary approved by the sponsoring commission of the local conference/eldership, preferably Winebrenner Theological Seminary. This educational program shall be carried out under the care of the appropriate sponsoring commission of a local conference/eldership.
 3. A person who is unable to complete the standard academic preparation described in section two (2), but who fulfills all other requirements for ordination, may petition the local conference/eldership for permission to follow an alternative educational route. If approved a person may be ordained if:
 - A. The candidate is at least thirty (30) years old or has served five (5) years of satisfactory ministry and has completed one of the following courses of academic preparation under the care of the appropriate committee or commission of the conferring conference/eldership.
 - The Diploma Course of Winebrenner Theological Seminary.
 - Certificate in Pastoral Studies
 - A Ministerial Training Course approved by the General Conference
 - A Bachelor's degree with a pre-ministerial major at a Bible college or Christian liberal arts college approved by the conferring conference/eldership, provided additional courses on Churches of God polity, doctrine and history have been completed.²

² In order to help commissions determine whether or not a particular institution should be approved, that institution's pre-ministerial major should be measured against the following outline of essential courses:

Bible (7 courses)
Old Testament ~3
New Testament ~3
Interpretation.

Theology (2 courses)

Church History Survey

Pastoral Ministry Courses
Counseling (2 courses)
Homiletics (2 courses)

A person may enter one of these alternate routes only if:

1. The candidate has demonstrated special reasons for not being able to complete the standard academic requirements.
 2. The candidate has requested and received permission to enter one of these alternate routes by the sponsoring commission of the local conference/eldership.
 3. The candidate is at least twenty-five (25) years old at the time of entrance.
- B. The candidate has entered the fellowship of the Churches of God from another recognized Christian body, holds a valid ordination from that body, has completed courses on Churches of God polity, history and doctrine, is in agreement with the teaching and practices of the Churches of God, has been a member of a local congregation of the Churches of God for three (3) years, has served under the care of the appropriate committee or commission of the local conference/eldership for a provisional period of three (3) years, and has been recommended by the proper committee or commission and approved by the conferring conference/eldership. It is the responsibility of the appropriate committee or commission to see that the standards for ordination of the original body are in sufficient agreement with the standards of the General Conference to allow ordination to be recognized during the provisional period. This recognition is temporary (for the purpose of providing ministry during the provisional period), but all non-Churches of God credentials must be returned to the conferring bodies before he or she can be ordained in the Churches of God. The conferences/elderships of the General Conference are not obligated to recognize any credentials issued by another body. It should be understood that in receiving a pastor for ministry under non-Churches of God credentials for a three (3) year provisional period, no guarantee is made that ordination in the Churches of God will be conferred at the end of that period.
- C. The candidate has served satisfactorily as a pastor in the Churches of God for not less than twenty (20) years, has reached the age of fifty-five (55) years, and is recommended by the appropriate committee or commission and approved by the conferring conference/eldership.

4. Ordained ministers of the Churches of God shall be in one of three (3) categories of ministerial service:

A. Active

Serving or available for service full time in a pastoral charge under appointment by a conference/eldership of the Churches of God or serving full time in a ministry approved by the conference/eldership where credentials are held. An ordained person who has been available for, but unassigned to, full time ministry for a period of five (5) years may be moved from active to inactive status by a vote of the conference/eldership in session.

Christian Education
Pastoral Theology
Spiritual Formation
Evangelism

B. Inactive

Not serving in a ministry appointed or approved by the local conference/eldership and placed on inactive status by a vote of the conference/eldership in session. An ordained minister can hold this status for no more than five (5) years without special approval by the conference/eldership in which ordination is currently held; if approval is not given ordination will be recalled.

C. Retired

Officially certified as disabled or retired.

5. Ordination credentials that have been surrendered or recalled may only be reinstated by the last conference/eldership in which ordination was held, according to procedures developed by each conference/eldership. Credentials for ministry of any kind cannot be granted by any conference/eldership to any person whose ordination has been surrendered or recalled, other than by the last conference/eldership in which ordination was held, without the approval of the General Conference Administrative Council.
6. The active ordained person is required to annually complete 20 hours of continual education as defined by their local conference.
7. The ordained person remains subject to the authority of the local conference/eldership and of the General Conference. Ordination may be recalled at any time for just cause by the conference/eldership in which ordination is currently held.

ANNUAL LICENSE

The Annual License is a provisional credential that allows persons to enter ministry who have not completed academic requirements for ordination but who have met all other requirements for credentials, who have been recommended by the local church in which membership is held, and who have entered an approved program of academic preparation under the care of the appropriate commission of the conferring conference/eldership.

1. Issuance of an Annual License is contingent on appointment to a pastoral charge or placement in an approved ministry.
2. This credential must be renewed annually. Renewal is contingent on acceptable ministry at the place of assignment and satisfactory continuation of the program of academic preparation. A maximum of ten (10) Annual Licenses may be issued.
3. The licentiate may administer the ordinances and unite persons in marriage while holding the first Annual License³ provided a mentor has been appointed and the licentiate has demonstrated an understanding of and the ability to perform such ministerial tasks. The sponsoring committee or commission of the conferring conference/eldership shall determine whether to grant this authority beginning with the first or any succeeding Annual License.

³ Rationale for this restriction:

- A. Provide order and discipline in God's house.
- B. Provide instruction so that the ordinances are observed properly.
- C. Maintain the special significance of the ordinances.
- D. To preserve continuity and consistency in the church's observance of the ordinances.
- E. The ultimate concern is not control but care - the Annual License is a preparatory, in-process credential.

Each conference/eldership should provide mentors and special instruction in the area of Ordinances.

FIVE (5) YEAR RENEWABLE LICENSE

A Five (5) Year Renewable License allows a person who does not wish to be available for full-time service to continue in long-term ministry.

1. A Five (5) Year Renewable License may be granted to a person who has met all qualifications for ordination, but who will not accept a full-time appointment to a pastoral charge.
2. A person receiving a Five (5) Year Renewable License must be serving in a part-time pastoral appointment of the conferring conference/eldership.
3. Persons holding a Five (5) Year Renewable License in the Churches of God shall be in one of two (2) categories of service:

A. Active

Is available for service or serving in a part-time pastoral appointment of the conference/eldership.

The Five (5) Year Renewable License shall be granted for a five (5) year period. It may be renewed for an unlimited number of five (5) year terms. However, failure to be available for such service may result in the recall, by due process, of the Five (5) Year Renewable License by the conference/eldership in which the Five (5) Year Renewable License is currently held.

The active renewable licentiate is required to annually complete 20 hours of continual education as defined by their local conference/eldership.

B. Retired

Officially certified as disabled or retired.

4. A Five (5) Year Renewable License confers the authority to perform all the duties of a minister of the Gospel.

LAY LICENSE

A Lay License provides opportunity for ministry for a lay person whose service is needed by the local conference/eldership to provide limited pastoral duties in a local church.

1. This status is subject to annual review by the local conference/eldership and may be renewed annually.
2. Demonstrate effective spiritual leadership in a local church, serving as elder or deacon.
3. Receive recommendation from their home church.

Persons holding a Lay License in the Churches of God shall be in one of two (2) categories of service:

Without Privilege:

A person holding the Lay License without privilege may administer the ordinances with proper guidance but may not unite persons in marriage.

A person holding a Lay License without privilege is not eligible for appointment as a pastor.

With Privilege:

A person holding the Lay License with privilege is eligible for appointment as a pastor and may administer the ordinances and may unite persons in marriage.

To be granted privilege a person must:

Be under the mentorship of an ordained pastor for a period of one year after which he received the mentor's recommendation.

Having been granted this privilege, the licentiate must meet quarterly with their mentor and attend at least one training seminar per year.