

READINESS FOR MINISTRY
GUIDELINES FOR PASTORAL MATURITY



Churches of God, General Conference

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Revised 2000

FOREWORD

In June 1998 the General Conference in session adopted an updated standard for ministerial credentials. This standard was drafted after input was provided by representatives from the several conferences through Consultation.

As this was done, the question in everyone's mind was: "What constitutes ministerial readiness? When is a man or woman prepared for ministry?"

Maturity in ministerial readiness is not easy to define. Consequently, each of the five areas consists of several key themes which further clarify the scope of the area. While the profile describes an ideal candidate for ministry, we would agree that no person would likely excel on every point. Thus, it is hoped that the profile will be used as a set of guidelines rather than a new legalism. At the same time, the document reflects the result of spirit-led discussion. Thus, if the profile should not be taken literally, it should be taken seriously by both the candidate and the various credentialing bodies,

The profile may also be useful to pastors currently involved in ministry. As the introduction points out, current pastors may want to reflect on and evaluate their own ministry in light of the several areas mentioned in the profile.

We trust that this Readiness for Ministry profile will be helpful in providing the church with mature, spirit-filled pastors.

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READINESS FOR MINISTRY

The CGGC believes that God calls men and women to serve the church as pastors. This personal call is an essential requirement for anyone seeking ministerial credentials in the Churches of God.

The call by itself, however, is not enough. It must be followed by preparation and it must be confirmed by the church. The process of preparation and confirmation is taught by Scripture. For example, when Jesus called the twelve, He led them through an intensive period of training that lasted three years. The early church ordained elders by the laying on of hands, a practice which by its very nature indicated that the call required confirmation. Paul instructed Timothy that an elder “must not be a recent convert” (I Timothy 3:6 NIV), and warned him, “do not be hasty in the laying on of hands” (I Timothy 5:22 NIV). The church has a biblical mandate to measure the readiness for ministry of any person professing to have received God’s call and seeking credentials for pastoral ministry.

PREPARATION for ministry should be guided by the proper commission of the regional conference that will confer credentials. When a person senses a call and is ready to begin thinking seriously about the ministry, that person should meet with the appropriate commission. A long-term relationship is established, and the applicant is said to be “under the care” of the commission. Close communication between the applicant and the commission should be maintained throughout the preparation process.

CONFIRMATION should be thought of as a process rather than a single action, and it should never be treated as an automatic result of the preparation process. As the applicant nears the completion of academic requirements, the commission that has the applicant under its care should begin the formal process of final evaluation to determine if the applicant is truly ready for service in the pastoral ministry. If approved by the commission, confirmation will come with the vote of the regional conference and the conferring of licensing credentials.

After at least one year of pastoring, ordinand will be evaluated and possibly conferred.

READINESS FOR MINISTRY is a key issue in both preparation and confirmation. When is a man or woman ready for ministry? It is helpful to think of readiness in terms of several basic dimensions of human experience:

Spiritual Readiness: The applicant is a mature believer in Jesus Christ.

Intellectual Readiness: The applicant has the necessary knowledge to function in the pastoral ministry.

Professional Readiness: The applicant has the skill needed to carry out pastoral duties in the local church.

Emotional Readiness: The applicant is emotionally mature.

Personal Readiness: The applicant's personal life is free of conflicts that may interfere with his or her effectiveness as a pastor.

A person is ready for ministry when readiness in these areas is integrated into readiness as a whole person for the pastoral calling.

The list that follows is a detailed profile of a person who is ready for ministry. It amplifies and clarifies the general description above. The profile should be used in different ways at various points in the preparation and confirmation process.

USES OF THE PROFILE

1. APPLICATION

When a person meets with the proper commission to begin the process, the applicant should be given a copy of the profile and the commission should review it with the applicant. The profile will help the applicant know what is expected of him or her and will also help focus the preparation process.

2. PREPARATION

The caring commission should be monitoring and evaluating the applicant throughout the preparation process. The profile can be used as a constant reference point in this ongoing evaluation. If problems are noted they can be addressed and steps taken to correct them. In this stage, the profile should be used as a diagnostic tool, rather than as a measure of final readiness.

3. CONFIRMATION

The profile should be the foundation for the confirmation process. Some sections of the profile may be addressed directly with such methods as written examinations and formal interviews. Other sections will depend more on the judgment of those who have known the applicant through the preparation process. In some cases, special methods may be needed (for example, outside counseling or personality testing). It should be remembered that all pastors differ in their strengths and weaknesses. The profile describes an ideal candidate for ministry. No applicant will match it exactly. Serious deficiencies may mean that credentials should be delayed or even denied. In other cases, an applicant may be weak in certain areas, but able to function on a minimum level for ministry. In the end, the decision regarding credentials will rest not on a checklist of specific characteristics, but on the measure of the applicant as a whole person.

4. CONTINUING EDUCATION

It is not true that if someone is ready for ministry today that they will still be ready for ministry two or five or ten years in the future. A pastor must make a continuing effort to remain ready for the challenges of the pastoral vocation. Persons who have received their credentials will find the profile a helpful guide for periodic self-examination. Used in this way it will point out areas where further learning, growth or renewal is needed. The profile is comprehensive enough that it will provide goals for improvement throughout one's ministry.

A final use of the profile should be noted. It will prove helpful in planning curricula and courses of study designed to prepare persons for the pastoral ministry.

THE PROFILE

The person who is ready for ministry:

SPIRITUAL LIFE

- 1. Confesses faith in Jesus Christ.**
 - A. Has made a decision of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
 - B. Is able to describe and reflect on his or her personal journey of faith and gives evidence of a changed life through Christ.
 - C. Is not a recent convert.
 - D. Has been baptized as a believer and participates in the Lord's Supper and Feetwashing.
- 2. Is committed to discipleship in his or her own life.**
- 3. Practices a personal devotional life.**
 - A. Maintains a regular schedule for private prayer.
 - B. Enriches his or her spiritual life with a variety of devotional materials.
 - C. Maintains a regular schedule for reading and reflecting on the Bible devotionally.
- 4. Maintains a mutual support relationship with a community of faith.**
- 5. Recognizes and utilizes personal spiritual gifts.**
- 6. Manifests continuing growth and transformation through Christ in all dimensions of his or her life.**

THE CALL

- 7. Demonstrates a genuine call to the pastoral ministry.**
 - A. Is able to describe the process by which he or she became aware of the call and the reasons for believing it to be a divine call to the pastoral ministry.
 - B. Is confident that he or she is sensing a call out of a sincere desire to serve God rather than ulterior motives (such as a desire to please others, a need to compensate for feelings of guilt, or the mistaken notion that ministry will be an easy occupation).

- C. Has “counted the cost,” has a realistic expectation of what the pastoral ministry will be like and is prepared to make the sacrifices and commitments that may be required.

8. Has a call that is confirmed by others.

- A. If married, is supported by his or her spouse in the decision to enter the pastoral ministry.
- B. Is supported by his or her pastor, who recognizes the candidate’s call and sees his or her potential for effective pastoral service.
- C. Has shown qualities of leadership in his or her local church as well as in other situations.
- D. Is supported by his or her local church and local regional conference.

PERSONALITY AND EMOTIONS

9. Is committed to becoming a whole person as defined by Scripture and shows evidence of that commitment in his or her life.

- A. Demonstrates the presence of the fruit of the Spirit in his or her attitudes and behavior, specifically: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).
- B. Is able to recognize areas of his or her life that are still subject to the carnal nature and is working on surrendering those areas fully to the authority of Jesus (see Galatians 5:16-21; Colossians 3:5-10).
- C. Recognizes Jesus Christ as the model and example of a complete human person and regards faith in and faithfulness to Christ as the primary conditions for inner healing and personal wholeness.

10. Demonstrates the marks of emotional maturity.

- A. Accepts responsibility for his or her own actions.
- B. Can be depended on to keep commitments and honor deadlines.
- C. Is able to work on long-term goals without immediate gratification.
- D. Is able to express his or her needs and feelings in direct and non-aggressive ways.
- E. Is able to deal with disappointment without becoming discouraged and giving up.

11. Is able to manage anger in appropriate ways.

- A. Is able to receive criticism graciously and with an open mind.
- B. Is able to deal with angry persons in loving and constructive ways.
- C. Is willing to accept counsel from others.
- D. Is willing to accept direction from and cooperate with persons in authority over him or her.
- E. Is able to resolve his or her own anger in constructive, non-aggressive ways.

12. Demonstrates a positive self-image.

- A. Is able to articulate a realistic assessment of his or her strengths and weaknesses.
- B. Is able to relate socially to other persons.
- C. Is able to maintain long-term loving relationships with significant friends and members of his or her immediate family.
- D. Is able to express affection in appropriate ways.
- E. Is able to express feelings of love, admiration or praise to other persons without embarrassment.
- F. Is able to receive praise and affirmation graciously.
- G. Is not hindered or controlled by compulsive or obsessive behavior in ways that would interfere with ministry.
- H. Is able to work and relate to others without the need for constant approval.
- I. Is able to express disagreement or differences of opinion without apologizing or becoming belligerent.

13. Knows his or her limits.

- A. Recognizes limits to his or her knowledge and ability.
- B. Knows how to recognize when he or she is overstressed and knows how to cope with stress.
- C. Is able to identify areas where he or she needs to grow.

D. Demonstrates a teachable spirit.

14. Is able to serve as well as lead.

A. Recognizes ways in which he or she may be tempted to abuse the authority of the pastoral office.

B. Is willing to protect and care for persons who are emotionally weak and vulnerable.

C. Sees the need for accountability and is willing to be accountable to the local church, regional conference and General Conference.

D. Understands that he or she will be expected to be an example to the people he or she will serve and accepts this without resentment.

E. Is able to reflect on the meaning of Jesus' example in washing the feet of the disciples and is able to describe what this example means for his or her personal life and vocation.

F. Is able to serve others graciously (protecting the dignity of those served), discreetly (without notice by others), quietly (without pomp), and cheerfully (without complaint).

PERSONAL MATTERS

15. Understands and is committed to the biblical standard of sexual morality.

A. Has a healthy, positive attitude toward his or her own sexuality and, if married, is able to enjoy a fulfilling sexual relationship with his or her spouse.

B. Is committed to chastity outside of marriage.

C. Knows the power of sexual feelings and does not underestimate his or her vulnerability to temptation.

D. Is able to relate to persons of the opposite sex as persons rather than as objects of sexual desire.

E. Regards homosexual relations as a sin. If aware of homosexual tendencies in himself or herself, the candidate will abstain from active homosexual relations and seek appropriate counseling.

16. Is able to be faithful to his or her family.

- A. If married, values his or her marriage as the most important human relationship in his or her life and actively nurtures and cultivates it.
- B. Has realistic expectations of the pressures that will be placed on his or her marriage and family by the pastoral ministry.
- C. Is willing to set limits on work in order to be a faithful parent and marriage partner.
- D. Is willing to protect the privacy and personal lives of his or her children.

17. Is physically able to perform the duties of the pastoral ministry.

- A. Abstains from tobacco, alcoholic beverages and illegal drugs.
- B. Does not abuse and is not dependent on chemical substances of any kind.
- C. Practices moderation and good nutrition in his or her diet.
- D. Receives regular physical checkups.
- E. Values physical fitness and plans for regular physical exercise.
- F. Understands the need to balance work, recreation and rest.

18. Is a good manager of his or her own finances.

- A. Demonstrates a spirit of contentment that does not depend on material possessions.
- B. Is able to live within his or her means.
- C. Knows that mismanagement of personal finances will damage his or her effectiveness for ministry.
- D. Does not become indebted at levels he or she cannot manage and uses credit and credit cards with caution.
- E. Will not raise the issue of compensation outside the channels established for that purpose.
- F. Will not borrow money from nor enter into business partnerships with members of his or her congregation.
- G. Practices good judgment in accepting gifts of cash or goods, and will return gifts that may compromise his or her integrity.

- H. Pays all taxes as required by law, unless Christian conscience prohibits.
 - I. Realizes that pastoral compensation is a matter of public record and will not attempt to conceal any part of that compensation.
 - J. Will avoid handling any money received by the church and will never handle church monies without witnesses or proper record of the transaction involved.
 - K. Will not use church accounts for his or her personal purchases in order to avoid paying taxes.
- 19. Has a good reputation in the community outside the church and is involved in community affairs.**
- 20. Is not prone to gossip and can keep confidences.**

DOCTRINE AND ACADEMIC PREPARATION

- 21. Has completed an approved program of preparation for pastoral ministry under the care of the appropriate committee or commission.**
- 22. Is able to explain and reflect on the basic dogmas of the Christian faith, including but not limited to:**

- Creation
- Revelation
- God
 - A. The idea of God
 - B. The Trinity
 - C. The Father
 - D. The Son
 - E. The Holy Spirit
- Incarnation
- Atonement/Salvation
- Resurrection/Second Coming
- The Church

- 23. Is familiar with the current official statement of the doctrines of the Churches of God and is able to explain and reflect on those doctrines, especially those that are emphasized by the Churches of God including:**

- The Church of God
- The New Birth
- The Ordinances
- Presbyterial Polity

Sanctification
Free Moral Agency

24. **Is familiar with the broad outline of Christian history, including non-western and non-Protestant expressions of Christianity, and is able to interpret the story of the Churches of God in the wider context of Protestantism and American Evangelicalism.**
25. **Is familiar with the history of the Churches of God, including the life and teachings of John Winebrenner and the development of Churches of God doctrine and tradition.**
26. **Is able and willing to teach, defend and promote the doctrine of the Churches of God as described in the current official doctrinal statement.**

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

27. **Is able to be a leader.**
 - A. Is able to envision what the church can become under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and is able to bring that vision to reality.
 - B. Is able to plan work to meet long-range goals and is able to deal with immediate details and concerns without losing sight of those goals.
 - C. Is able to lead the church he or she pastors in developing goals, objectives and strategies for the future.
28. **Is able to conceive, research, prepare and deliver original, biblically sound sermons that speak to real human needs and hold the interest of his audience.**
29. **Has a vision for and supports the total responsibility of the church in developing mature Disciples of Christ.**
 - A. Is able to give leadership to developing and implementing the education ministry of the church.
 - B. Is a competent teacher who is able to help people apply the biblical message to their lives.
 - C. Is able to develop and lead special classes and courses in the local church, including Bible studies, membership classes, workshops and elective Sunday school classes.
 - D. Is able to prepare for and lead small group discussions.

- E. Understands the importance of evaluation, planning and goal setting in the Christian Education program of the church and is able to guide the church in doing them.
- F. Understands methods for recruiting, training and supporting teachers and is able to practice these in the local church.
- G. Has a basic understanding of developmental tasks, readiness for learning and persistent life concerns.
- H. Is able to describe his or her theology of Christian Education.

30. Is a competent counselor.

- A. Is able to explain his or her preferred method of counseling.
- B. Understands the principle of confidentiality and practices it.
- C. Understands and practices good listening skills.
- D. Understands the grief process and is prepared to support persons experiencing it.
- E. Understands the purpose of, is familiar with resources for, and is able to provide premarital counseling.
- F. Understands transference and protection, is aware of the dangers involved, and is able to cope with them.
- G. Recognizes the limits of his or her counseling skills and knows when and where to make referrals.
- H. Is aware of the legal issues involved in pastoral care and knows how to protect himself or herself, and the church, from accusations of malpractice.

31. Is able to lead his or her people in effective stewardship.

- A. Practices good stewardship in his or her financial support for the church he or she serves.
- B. Understands and is able to explain the biblical principle of whole-life stewardship.
- C. Understands and is able to explain biblical teachings on material possessions.
- D. Understands and is able to explain biblical guidelines for the financial operations of the local church.

- E. Understands the importance of the church budget and is able to help his or her church develop and administer effective budgets.
- F. Understands the ethical guidelines regarding charitable donations and full financial accountability and is able and willing to lead his or her church in practicing such guidelines.
- G. Is able to develop and carry out a continuing program of stewardship education.
- H. Is familiar with the budgets of both the regional conference and the General Conference and is able to interpret them to the congregation that her or she pastors.

32. Is able to lead the church in worship.

- A. Understands the church year, recognizes its value for education and continuity, and is able to use it in ways that are appropriate for the culture and traditions of the local church.
- B. Is able to plan and lead a unified order of worship that integrates music, written resources, Scripture lessons and sermons around a common theme.
- C. Is able to speak, pray and read Scripture in public with a clear, natural voice and practices standard grammar and diction.
- D. Understands the special emphasis placed by the Churches of God on worship as the gathering of the community of faith around the Lord's Table and the Word of God.
- E. Is able to prepare and lead a funeral, wedding and the presentation of infants for the Lord's blessing.
- F. Is able to prepare and lead services for the observance of the ordinances.

33. Is a competent administrator.

- A. Is familiar with principles of time management and is able to manage his or her time effectively.
- B. Is able to be responsible for the keeping of accurate parish records.
- C. Is able to prepare an agenda and preside at meetings.
- D. Understands the importance of long-range planning and is able to develop such plans and maintain a church calendar.

- E. Understands the importance of delegation, is familiar with methods for delegation, and is able and willing to practice such methods in the local church.
- F. Is familiar with and able to use various forms related to church administration, including transfers, withdrawals, and certificates of marriage, baptism, membership and presentation of children for the Lord's blessing.
- G. Is able to write effective letters, memos, reports and other communications in clear, standard English.

34. Is able to build a sense of community in the local church.

- A. Understands the concept of the church as the family of God and is able to teach this concept to his or her people.
- B. Is able to model Christian love and fellowship in his or her relationships with people in the local church.
- C. Demonstrates an attitude of caring and is able to cultivate that attitude in the local church.
- D. Is familiar with resources for developing a sense of community in the local church.
- E. Is able to teach and demonstrate good conflict resolution skills.

35. Has a vision for church growth.

- A. Is familiar with the insights, research and principles of the church growth movement and is able to explain and apply them in his or her church.
- B. Understands the difference between maintenance ministry and growth ministry.
- C. Understands the importance of small groups for church growth and is able to develop small groups in his or her church.
- D. Is able to develop plans and programs for welcoming and assimilating new people.
- E. Is able to cope with resistance to church growth in ways that will not make people feel threatened or defensive.
- F. Understands the importance of friendship evangelism, bridges and networks in reaching and cultivating prospects.
- G. Is able to describe his or her philosophy of evangelism and outreach.

- H. Is able to lead individuals to a decision of faith in Jesus Christ.
 - I. Is able to teach others how to be effective witnesses for Christ.
- 36. Is able to lead the church in understanding and accepting the mission of the church to the global community.**
- A. Is able to interpret and build support for the trans-cultural missions of the Churches of God.
 - B. Is able to help his or her people understand the biblical principle of love, justice, and responsibility for their neighbor as a foundation for Christian social responsibility.
 - C. Is able to lead his or her people in understanding and practicing faithful stewardship of God's creation.
- 37. Is willing to take advantage of opportunities for continuing education.**

LOYALTY TO THE CHURCHES OF GOD

- 38. Is a member in good standing of a local congregation of the Churches of God.**
- 39. Is familiar with and supportive of the ministries and of the Churches of God on both the regional conference and General Conference levels.**
- 40. Is familiar with the polity of the Churches of God and is willing to be subject to the authority of the regional conference and the General Conference.**
- 41. Considers service to the regional conference and General Conference to be an extension of his or her ministry to the local church.**
- 42. Participates in regional conference and General Conference projects and programs.**
- 43. Is willing to surrender immediately any ministerial credentials issued by the Churches of God when ordered to do so by the regional conference or the General Conference.**
- 44. Is willing and able to file annual statistical reports and provide other information required by the regional conference or General Conference and to comply with stated formats and deadlines.**
- 45. Will accept and participate in a relationship with a mentor assigned by the regional conference.**