

Rationale for and Benefits of Credentialing in the EFCA



1. **Recognition** of God's Calling to and Gifting for Ministry

God's call in a person's life to Himself and to vocational ministry is certainly personal and individual. But that calling to and gifting for ministry is affirmed and confirmed by the people of God, the body of Christ (cf. Acts 6:3; 15:22; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). Affirmation of God's calling brings an assurance of God's calling and leading in a person's life, and it ensures one will not "lose heart" when difficulties and challenges are encountered in ministry (2 Cor. 4:1). Confirmation of character means that the credentialed person will lead both by preaching/teaching and through life (1 Tim. 4:16). Not only do they preach the gospel of Christ, they live the gospel of Christ. Verification of gifts for ministry ensures that gifts are used appropriately for the purpose they were given – to build up others in the local church (Eph. 4:11-16).

2. **Interdependency** Between the Local Church, the District and the National Office – To Ensure Commitment to and Alignment of Beliefs (Statement of Faith) and Ethos

The EFCA is identified as an "association and fellowship of autonomous but interdependent congregations of like faith and congregational government." The "like faith" is the Statement of Faith. Local churches become an EFC Church through the district and all are required to "adopt the Statement of Faith." The one key component that keeps EFCA churches united in doctrine and mission is the Statement of Faith. The local church, the district and the national office work together to ensure churches, when they become an EFC Church, and pastors, through the credentialing process, affirm the Statement of Faith and are aligned in beliefs and ethos. This means we affirm the essentials of the faith and grant liberty with charity on non-essentials, which we refer to as the "significance of silence" (cf. Jn.17; Acts 13; 1 Cor. 16).

3. **Accountability** to the Local church and to the Denomination, Both Doctrinally and Morally

The challenge for many in ministry is that they engage in ministry and leadership alone. For some this means they are alone, while for others it means they are exempt from accountability concluding they are above or beyond it. Just as attendees in local churches are encouraged and exhorted to become members, so those in vocational ministry ought to lead the way by being accountable to the local church and to the denomination, both doctrinally and morally (cf. Matt. 18:17; 2 Cor. 8:19; 1 Tim. 5:19). This ensures the biblical and theological competency and moral integrity of vocational ministers in the EFCA. It also brings confidence and assurance (reassurance) to church leaders and members that their pastor(s) is an "approved worker/servant" biblically and theologically who is held to a high standard (2 Tim. 2:15; cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). Furthermore, to ensure ongoing doctrinal fidelity, all those credentialed in the EFCA must reaffirm their belief in the Statement of Faith every five years.

4. **Development** Educationally and Personally

The credentialing process is a structured process for personal and ministerial enrichment and maturity, theological education, reflection and development. Some will use the credentialing

process as a means of independent study to grow biblically and theologically. Others will use the credentialing process to join with others as they learn together. This shared learning provides encouragement and accountability through the process. Still others will use this process as a time to review what has already been studied of the Scripture and theology and to sharpen themselves in their thinking and living. All options prepare individuals to write a credentialing paper which will be read by a council and subsequently orally defended before that council. This is a time for the candidate to articulate their biblical and theological beliefs and to manifest that all theology leads to doxology. This intentional and purposeful process aids in the goal of being approved workers/servants who handle accurately the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15; cf. Col. 1:28; 2 Pet. 3:18).

5. **Confirmed** Legal Status by the IRS (through EFCA)

In addressing the IRS and housing allowance, there are two matters – the credential and ministry responsibilities (cf. Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). The IRS states that it is essential that one be licensed, commissioned or ordained. Since the EFCA has a national credential, the Conference expects that those in ministry in a local EFC Church will be credentialed following the Conference-approved national process. Ministry responsibilities include some, not all, of the following: performing qualified services, administration of the ordinances, be considered a religious leader by the church, lead worship, and oversee the ministry of the church. (It is important to note that we would recommend credentialing in the EFCA whether or not there were any additional financial benefits gained. This is first and foremost a call of God which is affirmed by His people. If we would ever be forced to compromise our call to Christ and the gospel, we would, with the early church, say “we must obey God rather than man” [Acts 4:19-20; 5:29].)

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