

Policy on Spiritual and Character Qualifications Related to the Granting of Ministerial Credentials within the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA)

Introduction

The Evangelical Free Church of America is committed to biblical standards of eldership as foundational for those receiving an EFCA ministerial credential. This includes the Ministry License, the Certificate of Christian Ministry, the Certificate of Ordination, and the Transfer of Ordination. While some EFCA credentials are given to leaders in vocational ministry who are not in the elder/overseer/ shepherd- pastor role, the biblical standards for elders provide foundational guidelines for all who receive an EFCA credential.

The Board of Ministerial Standing (BOMS) is charged with the responsibility of upholding these standards in approving candidates for credentials and in handling discipline cases for those who are credentialed. Partnership with EFCA Districts, their credentialing Boards and Councils are vital to overseeing and sharing relevant information and recommendations to BOMS. The local church that recommends a candidate in cooperation with the district process will do the primary evaluation of these qualifications and pass evaluations and concerns along with their recommendations to BOMS.

Godly character and personal integrity are expected of all believers. Passages such as Galatians 5:16-26, focusing on “the fruit of the Spirit,” and Ephesians 4, the “worthy walk” are foundational. All of Scripture contributes to an understanding of godliness for those who are followers of Christ and called to leadership.

Biblical Texts

Several passages set forth essential qualifications for spiritual leadership, specifically for anyone who serves as an elder/overseer/pastor. Most of these qualifications are expected of all believers, but must be exemplary of leaders.

1 Timothy 3:1-7¹

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.

Titus 1:6-9

An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he

¹ Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations come from the New International Version, 1984.

must be blameless-- not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

1 Peter 5:1-4

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

Review of General Character

Those who apply for an EFCA credential must be examined for evidence or demonstration of the qualifying standards set forth in the above biblical texts. The local church which recommends a candidate will be the primary source for review and endorsement that the applicant qualifies by biblical standards. District Councils should include a review of this with the candidate and local church representatives and pass their findings to BOMS as part of their recommendation of the candidate. With the applicant physically present, District Councils shall include a public review of the candidate's embodiment of these qualities. Along with local church representatives, the Council will then pass their findings on to BOMS as part of their recommendation of the candidate.

Spiritual Walk and Fruitfulness – The patterns of spiritual growth and consistency as well as the record of ministry service shall be reviewed with particular focus on servant-heartedness and consistently effective ministry operating out of spiritual giftedness and calling.

Reputation – Any evidence or charge of questionable reputation, both within and outside the church, must be identified and reviewed with appropriate recommendations made from the local church and District Council to BOMS.

Relational Issues – Healthy patterns of relating well to people on all levels, positive interaction and healthy response to conflict and disagreement must be reviewed with a focus on the evidence of the “fruit of the Spirit” in personal interaction.

Moral and Ethical Failure - Transparency regarding notable failures from the past is expected of all credential candidates, giving evidence of repentance and spiritual growth, noting that sufficient time has passed so that restoration to “good reputation” is generally established and recognized. Again, this will be the primary responsibility of a candidate to disclose relevant data. It will be the primary responsibility of the local church and the District Council to review and make recommendations to BOMS. Any applicable EFCA policy must be noted and applied, including but not limited to policies on pornography, plagiarism, sexual immorality, co-habitation, homosexual belief and conduct, and sexual abuse of a minor.

Financial Stewardship – Attitudes toward money and wise financial habits shall be reviewed with a focus on any unresolved financial matters that raise questions of character or affect the candidate's reputation.

Review of Marriage and Family Relationships

As marriage and family relationships are a vital part of biblical qualifications, particular focus should be given to a candidate's commitment to biblical teaching on singleness, marriage, and family. It is expected that all credential candidates will give evidence of a credible record of biblical faithfulness in these matters in personal conviction and practice.

Among the biblical requirements is the expectation that the candidate "be the husband of but one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2 Titus 1:6). Additionally, "he must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)" (1 Timothy 3:4, 5).

Thus, the health of one's marriage and marital faithfulness are essential qualifications. The issue of a previous divorce and/or marriage to one previously divorced is not an automatic disqualifier for a ministry credential, but it will be reviewed. Although marital history must be considered, the focus of Scripture is primarily on one's current life and character.

Current Marital Health – Candidates should be reviewed in regard to their marriage with one's spouse being included in the conversation to express his/her evaluation. Again, local church and District Councils will carry the primary responsibility to review and recommend.

Singleness and Pre-marital History – Candidates must be in compliance and agreement with Scripture and all EFCA policy positions on sexual ethics, particularly a commitment to celibacy outside of marriage and faithfulness within a biblically sanctioned marriage between a man and a woman. The history of past sin and moral failures will be reviewed. As with all moral and ethical matters, evidence of repentance and spiritual maturity over a reasonable amount of time will be of major consideration.

Marital History – Any previous marriage(s) must be disclosed and reviewed. In the case of divorce(s), or marriage(s) to a previously divorced person, the circumstances that led to the divorce(s) must be reviewed, noting whether such was granted on biblical grounds, and if not, the indication of repentance, efforts at reconciliation, and evidence of spiritual and emotional maturity. All crucial facts must be reviewed by the District Council with a report to BOMS as to whether the specific divorce history is or is not a hindrance to receiving an EFCA credential. Also, when a person currently holding a ministry credential undergoes separation, divorce, is in an "at risk" marriage, or enters into marriage with a previously divorced person, the appropriate District Council must review the case and report its findings to BOMS for evaluation. Depending on the details, BOMS may uphold/reaffirm the individual's credential or, if biblical standards have been violated, may implement disciplinary action requiring that one's credential be placed "in trust." In some cases, BOMS may take action to revoke the credential. In the case of an "at risk" marriage, a person holding the credential will be asked to step aside from ministry for a season for a time of healing and evaluation.

Particular Application Related to Divorce History

Circumstances of a candidate's divorce history do not necessarily preclude a candidate from obtaining a credential. In the case of a biblically unjustifiable divorce or a biblically unjustifiable remarriage, the concerns include:

1. What was the contribution of the credential applicant or credentialed person in the circumstances that led to the divorce? Was the credential applicant or credentialed person guilty of sin in

causing or in pursuing the divorce? Has that sin been acknowledged and confessed? Has reconciliation been attempted?

2. Has there been maturing spiritual growth under church authority so that there is current evidence of an unwavering commitment to God, the covenant of marriage, sexual purity, awareness of and grief over sin, living a life of repentance and godliness?

The purpose of this evaluation is to determine whether the candidate meets the standards established in Scripture for church leaders. Specific implementation procedures will be developed in cooperation between EFCA national and district leaders.

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