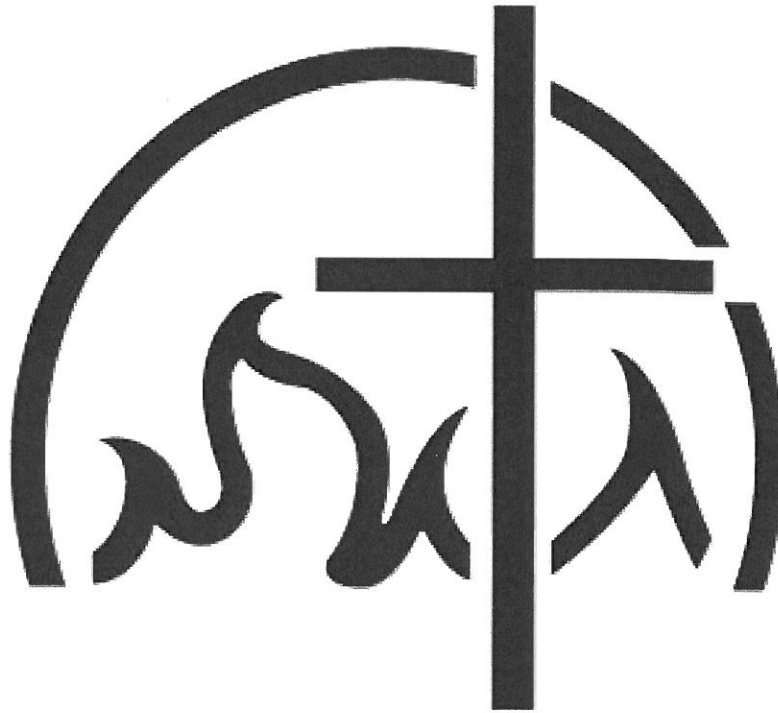


MINISTERIAL CREDENTIALS



Churches of God

GENERAL CONFERENCE

**Churches of God, General Conference
700 East Melrose, P.O. Box 926
Findlay, OH 45839**

**As approved by 54th Session of the General Conference
July 2013**

Credentialing in the CGGC

In keeping with our roots as a movement, our understanding of the New Testament picture, and the desire to facilitate movement in the mission of Jesus, the following model for credentialing is being proposed.

Licensure

A Ministerial License is granted to those who are involved in ministry leadership, either serving as the key persons responsible for a congregation, or otherwise engaged in some significant missional ministry (e.g. cross cultural missions, youth ministry, church planting, justice ministry), to affirm their character, competency, and calling, and to provide a means of oversight and accountability for their ministries. The license is viewed as a full but provisional credential, and so the distinction of “with” or “without” privilege has been eliminated.

- The Ministerial License may be granted by regional Vocations Commissions and by General Conference Commissions under the authority of the General Conference Administrative Council.
- The license may also be granted by apostolic teams of leaders who operate translocally, and by local churches engaged in outward missional ministry, if they have been granted authority to do so by the vocations commission of the region in which they operate (who may also revoke said permission at any time). When the license is granted by apostolic teams or local churches, these must
 - Keep the regional Vocations Commission informed of their actions.
 - Connect those they license into the fellowship of the Region and the larger church.
- The Ministerial License shall be granted to candidates who meet the character, competency, and calling requirements established by the General Conference in concert with the Regions. Those granting the license may add whatever additional requirements they consider necessary in keeping with a healthy New Testament picture (*e.g. education, training, life experience*).
- The Ministerial License may be transferable between regions, with the understanding that a licensed ministry leader must immediately pursue relationship with the Vocations Commission of the Region.
- The license shall be renewable annually.

Ordination

Those who have demonstrated their character, competency, and calling during a period of licensure, or, if they are coming into the CGGC as an ordained person from the outside, by virtue of a solid ministry record, may be granted full Ordination. Ordination shall be granted by the Regions according to established written standards. Ordination shall generally be considered as given for the remainder of the life of the minister, but the Regions are strongly encouraged to develop mechanisms which provide continued peer-relationships, support, and accountability for leaders.

The 1990 document Readiness for Ministry (Guidelines for Pastoral Maturity) is available to help provide specific “standards” for Regions as they process the issues of call, character, and competence.

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Background

As the Churches of God, General Conference (CGGC) we are a body of Christians on mission together. Our task is to make Jesus known so people everywhere may experience Christ's good news and have an opportunity to respond in faith believing (Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:8). The primary purpose of this mission is to make more and better disciples. To accomplish this task we have three priorities: discipleship ministries, church development, and world evangelism. Obviously each one requires committed leadership at every level of the Church.

From the start, the CGGC recognized the need for biblical leadership in the Church. This leadership is local and corporate, but in either setting is governed by God's call and the individual's character and competency or giftedness. John Winebrenner made this amply clear in his seminal work, *A Brief View, or the Formation, Government and Discipline, of the Church of God*. (Harrisburg, 1829). Based upon New Testament teaching he identified two classes of local church leaders, namely deacons and elders. The second of these he identified as ruling and teaching elders. Teaching elders are those who oversee the church and exercise up-front leadership gifts in preaching, teaching, evangelism, worship, visioning, etc.

"When any church member thinks himself called of God, to take upon him the sacred office of the ministry, and to preach the gospel of the grace of God, he should be permitted to exercise his gifts before the church, for a time; and provided they are found to be such as the nature of the holy office requires – and provided, also, his general character answers the same, the individual church, of which he is a member, should proceed to ordain him an *Elder of the church of God*. This should be done by the Eldership of the church, but never without the consent, and the direction of a majority of its members. When the ordination is regularly performed, the *Presbytery, or Eldership* of the church, ought to give to the person ordained, a written certificate of his ordination, signed by them, on behalf of the church..." Winebrenner: *A Brief View*, p. 101.

In 1830 Winebrenner and others formed the first eldership of congregations, followed fifteen years later by the organization of a General Eldership. This expanded structure added the approval of the regional eldership (later called conference) as a part of the process for credentialing teaching elders (pastors). The 1845 CGGC constitution clearly stated in article 17 that "No person shall be considered an accredited Minister in the Church of God, without a regular license; and all the preachers in good standing shall have their license renewed annually by the Elderships of which they are members." The annual renewal for all ministers continued until 1893 when the General Conference recommended that the elderships grant life ordination to those who by their proven character and competence did not require annual review. Of course they were still accountable to the eldership for their "moral and religious character."

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During the twentieth century, credentialing in the CGGC became more defined but kept the basic concept of licensing those new to ministry and ordaining those who had proven themselves. This is a New Testament principle based on a relational mentoring system. Jesus used it with his disciples as did Paul (1 Timothy 3:10). However, across the broader Church, including the CGGC, this scriptural principle tended to be codified and institutionalized over time. Oversight tended to be more regulatory and less relational, often seeing formal education as the silver cord rather than calling or character. Life ordination became a destination, even a status symbol, more than a mark of competency or commitment.

A huge danger in any credentialing system is to create two distinct classes of Christians, clergy and laity. Another is the emphasis upon pastoral ministry or shepherding to the exclusion of other leadership gifts (See Ephesians 4:11-16). These issues and others pose a significant challenge to maintaining a biblical approach in credentialing. From the birth of the CGGC in 1830 the body committed itself to three priorities: to make more and better disciples, to establish churches on the New Testament plan, and to proclaim the gospel around the world. So, if the church today is intent on reaching lost people (the world) for Jesus and it wants to do so with a biblical methodology, then it becomes critical that it endorse a credentialing system true to the apostolic witness found in the New Testament and that promotes the multiplication of disciples, leaders, and churches worldwide. Simply stated the validation processes for ministry in the CGGC need to be built upon New Testament teaching and example as much as possible and be ministry or outcomes focused. To these ends this proposal to revise the current credentialing process in the CGGC is offered.

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Three Essentials for Ministry

The Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, presents three essentials for the leadership of God's people, namely call, character, and competence. This three-part cord of service to the Lord and mankind can be seen in many different people in various contexts throughout the Bible. Consider the examples of Moses, Deborah, Isaiah, Peter, Paul, and Mary; and then there's David, Esther, John the Baptizer, Dorcas, Timothy, and so many more. Each possessed a work to do from God, the will and spirit to do it, and the giftedness necessary to accomplish the task. No one more than Jesus evidences these three qualities as demonstrated in his ministry. His call, character, and competence provide the model. He is the standard for ministry. Every Christian leader must pattern their life and work after the master. As Paul aptly stated, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

In the Churches of God, General Conference (CGGC) the three essentials of call, character, and competence provide a biblical framework to identify and empower people for ministry. These three lie at the core of local church work, but they become ever more crucial as the scope of ministry enlarges. "To whom much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48). Each of the three possesses personal and public dimensions that need to be considered before anyone is recognized and released for ministry by the body of Christ, whether in a local church context or in the larger Church. The process of assessment and affirmation for ministry used to evaluate these three essentials must be centered in prayer and spiritual discernment (Acts 13:1-5).

An articulated call is the first priority for ministry. This call is both spiritual (given by God) and ecclesiastical (affirmed by the Church). The call originates in God's invitation to receive his grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8, 9), and results in a transformed life of service (Ephesians 2:10). Consider the experience of the Apostle Paul (Acts 9). All disciples of Jesus must die to themselves and take up the cross (the work) he gives them (Luke 9:23). This call to an outward expression of faith in Christ is general and specific. That is to say all disciples are called to serve, but each is called to a particular task. Paul's admonition concerning deacons provides a general guideline when affirming God's call in a person's life. He wrote, "They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons" (1 Timothy 3:10). None but those who are truly born-again by God's Spirit and evidence a transformed life should ever be placed in positions of leadership in the Church. Where there is a true call to ministry there will be proof positive of that call in the individual's life and service. They will be committed to Christ and his work! So, before anyone serves, let them be proven.

The second priority for ministry, character, flows from the first and it too possesses internal and external aspects. It grows from personal communion with Christ and is evident in one's conduct. Anyone who would minister in the name of Jesus needs a close personal relationship with him that is rooted in the word, prayer, and personal devotion (Acts 16:25, Philippians 4:6, Ephesians 5:19-20). In the inner life, this focus on spiritual things will lead to intimacy with the Lord which will cleanse the heart and soul, and also lead to outward conduct that honors God and blesses others. The fruit of the

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Spirit (Galatians 5:22-26) will be evident in the leader's attitudes (love, joy, peace), abilities (longsuffering, kindness, goodness), and actions (faithfulness, humility, self-control). Christian character is about being a Jesus follower in every dimension of one's being and manifesting his qualities before others.

In order for a call to be fulfilled and one's character to be maintained, the third essential for leadership in the Church must also be present, namely competence. It can be defined as "being fit for the job," or "having the requisite abilities" to complete the given task. Obviously doing the work to which Christ calls his disciples requires proficiency equal to the ministry context and needs. The ability to minister grows out of experience as well as natural talents, learned skills, and spiritual gifts. These resources vary from person to person as do the ones needed in a given ministry context. Hence, it behooves every Church leader to learn from their mistakes and successes, to maximize their God-given talents, to study the Word (2 Timothy 2:15), and to seek spiritual gifts as needed (1 Corinthians 12:31). Where there are competent Christian leaders with good training and sound doctrine the Church prospers and the body builds itself up in love (Ephesians 4:1-16).

NOTE: The CGGC document, *Readiness for Ministry*, provides an extensive outline covering issues of character and competence that can assist in the process of assessing and counseling candidates for ministry. The same document may also be useful in the local church for leadership development. In addition all those seeking credentials in the CGGC will take a course on Churches of God history and polity.

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The Dynamics of the New Testament Picture

Our CGGC mission statement promotes the “establishment of churches on the New Testament plan.” When we seek to discover what the New Testament might tell us about affirming and sending leaders, we find a mixture of *prescriptive* and *descriptive* passages. The prescriptive texts (i.e. 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1) have more to do with the competency and character qualifications of leaders, while the descriptive texts (scattered across Acts and the Epistles) have more to do with just how leaders were affirmed and sent. Sometimes it is suggested that we cannot build our own approach to “credentialing” on what are primarily descriptive passages, yet the reality is that if we ignore the descriptive texts, we will find very little help at all in the New Testament. It seems healthy to assume that the early apostolic community affirmed and sent leaders in the way the Holy Spirit led them to, and that the Holy Spirit led them to do things in these ways for good reasons. While we may not need to mimic the descriptions we see in the New Testament, it seems right to look for the patterns and principles which facilitated such powerful movement and multiplication of the Church in those early days.

What is abundantly clear in the New Testament is that leaders in the early Church took the selection and affirmation of leaders seriously. We see this in the requirements for leaders given in 1 Timothy and Titus, and in Paul’s exhortation not to be “hasty in the laying on of hands” (1 Timothy 5:22). One of the strengths of the CGGC in the past has been that we have taken seriously the matter of “credentialing” for ministry. Along with taking leadership matters seriously, it seems clear that there were relationships of accountability as leaders lived out their callings. We see this in Paul’s final words to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, in his letters to his protégés Timothy and Titus, in his opposition to the “pseudo-apostles” of 2 Corinthians 11, and in the Council at Jerusalem in Acts 15. Paul left Titus on Crete to appoint elders in the various towns (Titus 1:5). These elders were, in all likelihood, accountable to Titus, who in turn was accountable to Paul. It also seems clear that while Paul moved in a great deal of freedom, he clearly saw himself as one member of a larger apostolic community (see Jerusalem Council in Acts 15).

It is noteworthy that as the modern Church migrated toward the singular moniker of “pastor” for nearly all those in ministry leadership, the prominent place given to the concept of “elders” in the New Testament slipped off the radar. Not only does it seem that local churches were led by a plurality of elders (1 Timothy 5:17; Acts 20:17), but even those who ministered more translocally as apostles still considered themselves elders. For example, Peter writes, “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder” (1 Peter 5:1). The logical integration of these things suggests that perhaps “elder” is a designation of the primary *office* of leadership, and apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd and teacher are designations of one’s particular *calling*. In some measure the Church has always recognized this, applying Paul’s requirements for elders to those aspiring to pastoral ministry. Interestingly, John Winebrenner seems to have seen this in the New Testament, hence the strong emphasis on *eldership* (locally and translocally) in the early Churches of God movement.

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If this understanding is correct (that eldership is the office, and that those who hold the office may be variously gifted as described in Ephesians 4:11 & 1 Corinthians 12:28), this means that local church elders ought to be primarily ministry-oriented, and not merely decision makers on a church board, and that the 1 Timothy and Titus requirements apply equally to those in fulltime ministry leadership and to the others who serve on a local church's board of elders. The primary question of any elder ought to be what their gifting is for ministry to people. At the same time, there are hints in the New Testament of churches having one or more primary leaders among the elders. In particular, Paul seems to recognize those within the eldership of a local church "whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Timothy 5:17). There is also New Testament backing for the financial support of some elders, apparently when the majority of their time is given to the work of ministry (1 Timothy 5:18, 1 Corinthians 9:7-14).

At the present time, there is a healthy movement underway back toward the fuller spectrum of the various ministry giftings/callings. Ephesians 4:11 lists them as apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd (pastor), and teacher. We cannot assume this list to be exhaustive, but it seems to represent the core roles Paul saw as being essential to the mission of Jesus. Some have suggested that in 1 Corinthians 12:28 (the closest parallel to the Ephesians list) "teachers" likely includes the shepherds of Ephesians 4, and that perhaps those with gifts of healing and miracles, and those "able to help others" parallel the evangelists of Ephesians 4.

For some time across the modern period, many in the Body of Christ have taught that the only apostles were the original Twelve plus Matthias and Paul, and that the role of apostle was intended only for the formative first years of the Church. It does seem clear that the Twelve comprised a unique group. Note, for example, the apostles' concern that they "choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us" (Acts 1:21; see also Revelation 21:14). The language of Ephesians 4:13, however, suggests that all of these ministry giftings, including that of apostle, have been given to the church "until" (Greek *mechri*) the Church reaches the place of being a collective "completed" or "finished" man (the use of the Greek *teleios* hearkens to Paul's paradigm of the new creation God is bringing into being). Coupled with references to others outside the Twelve whom Paul recognizes as apostles (Acts 14:14, Romans 16:7), it seems clear that the calling to apostleship was not limited to the Twelve or to the days of the early Church.

It is unfortunate that in our own day the words "apostle" and "prophet" can conjure up images of self-aggrandizing leaders who love titles and the exercise of power over others. If indeed these giftings were meant for the success of the mission of Jesus across the ages, then we must redeem these words and concepts, reinvesting them with their healthy New Testament meanings. We should note that apostle and prophet appear first and second, respectively, in all three New Testament lists where they are paired (Ephesians 2:20 & 4:11, 1 Corinthians 12:28). This is most likely because of the primary functions they serve, the apostle pioneering (the word means "one sent forth with orders") and the prophet continually calling the church to faithfulness. One role of the apostle seems to have been to take the gospel into new territory. When we

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consider Paul's letters and the Acts 15 appeal to the apostles in Jerusalem, a second role of the apostles seems to have been the shaping of how leaders across the Church would think about important questions touching both gospel and mission. Both of these roles seem to naturally flow from the commission Jesus gave the original Twelve.

If we align ourselves with this full picture of New Testament leadership, we find ourselves affirming and sending not only pastors (shepherds), but those called to the other ministry leadership roles as well. In fact, if we read the New Testament with open eyes, we will see that we have neglected the necessary and God-given roles of apostle and prophet, by which the Holy Spirit seeks to lead the mission of Jesus and keep it on track.

As the Church in Western culture has come to function more like an institution and less like a movement, we do seem to have lost two important dynamics we see in the vibrant early Church. The first is an expectation for the dynamic leading of the Holy Spirit as we seek to live the mission and see leaders raised up for the harvest. There has often been the tendency for commissions and denominational leaders to drift into a more mechanical approach to the processes involved in credentialing leaders. We begin to see the question as "Who should we approve?" rather than "What is God doing next and who does He want to do it through?" We should guard against thinking of ourselves more as regulators than missional leaders. We see a more Spirit-led dynamic in places like Acts 13, where we are told that as the "prophets and teachers" in Antioch worshipped and fasted, "the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" The same thing is visible where Paul tells Timothy, "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid hands on you" (1 Timothy 4:14). These occurrences represent missional movement directed by the Holy Spirit.

Another early Church dynamic we seem to have lost is the way the affirmation and sending of leaders seems to have followed the mission from place to place. Credentialing leaders seems to have been centralized in apostolic authority (i.e. Timothy and Titus ordaining as authorized by Paul), but decentralized in that it followed the footsteps of the mission as the grassroots movement of early Christianity multiplied across the Mediterranean region. The clearest example of this we glimpse in the New Testament is the way that Paul and his designees ordained leaders on location in places where the gospel was preached and churches were established (and as we referenced above, Paul himself was initially set apart by leaders at a local church level—Acts 15). It seems that Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, Titus, and perhaps others, formed a sort of apostolic team or network. And that team obviously had the approval of the broader apostolic community to raise up and affirm leaders wherever the Spirit-led mission took them. When we study dynamic movements in the history of the Church, we note that one characteristic which often marks them is allowing a broader array of missional leaders to raise up, equip, affirm, and send ministry leaders (i.e. pastors, church planters, missionaries, etc.). This is because a somewhat decentralized approach to "credentialing" facilitates the flow of the mission more readily. We see this

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dynamic in the early Church, and we see it in apostolic-led movements such as the church in China and many parts of Africa and South America today.

What are we to conclude from all of this? In order to carry out ministry in accordance with “the New Testament plan,” we must embrace some basic principles the Spirit seems to have given for good reason, particularly:

1. The recovery of seeing all primary ministry leaders as *elders*, and all elders as people with ministry callings.
2. The desire to see the full spectrum of ministry callings God gives in operation in the church (apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher), that the church may be as dynamic and fruitful as God desires.
3. The affirming and sending of leaders for the mission of Jesus once again set in the context of the Spirit’s leading, so that we are driven less by a desire to regulate and more by the question “What is God doing, and who does he want to do it through?”
4. Allowing our processes for affirming and sending leaders to follow the mission from place to place and facilitate its flow, specifically by allowing apostolic leaders and churches with an “apostolic/missional passion” to credential leaders.

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Identifying the Components of Change: Symposium Results

The March 14-15, 2012 Credentials Symposium brought together some 40 leaders and representatives from across the CGGC, in order to create a practical credentialing process that is spiritual, biblical, and effectual to affirm, equip and send those persons called to ministry in the CGGC. Below is a summary of the “keep, discard, and add” components of credentials identified by the plenary group. Items were identified first by groups, and then individuals were invited to choose one item per category as most important. (Please be aware that this is not an exhaustive list; only those components that were affirmed by at least seven individuals and/or groups are dealt with here.)

Components to Keep: Broadly speaking, these components focus on calling, character, and competency as important to retain.

- “Ordination as a regional event” (6 individuals and 3 groups): The concern here is that the conference confers ordination rather than an individual leader or church (cf. 1 Timothy 4:14).
- “Competency, deliberate process common to all, Bible knowledge, background” (23 individuals and 3 groups): This enjoyed the vast majority of support, and obviously speaks to the necessity of all credentialed leaders meeting the character and competency standards established by conferences.

Components to Discard: This category was more diverse than the first, and so the three components mentioned below didn’t receive as many affirmations.

- “With/Without privileges” (5 individuals and 2 groups): Several (if not all) conferences distinguish between “license with privilege” (i.e. qualified to officiate at the ordinances and weddings) and “license without privilege.”
- “Clergy/laity distinction, caste system of licenses” (7 individuals and 1 group): Together with the above component, many clearly want to eliminate the vestiges of sacerdotal theology as reflected by the clergy/laity distinction, namely in the administration of the ordinances. It is recommended that the leadership (e.g. the elders) of a local church – not the conference – determines who shall administer the ordinances.
- “Academic course” (14 individuals and 2 groups): This component had the most marks, and the discussion largely focused on the need to eliminate unnecessary (and onerous) academic requirements for credentials, particularly for licensees.

Components to Add: Again, there was quite a bit of diversity in these responses, but three components stand out.

- “Multiply assessments (e.g. ethnic)” (7 individuals and 2 groups): This issue speaks to one of the main presenting issues for the credentialing discussion, i.e. credentialing/vocations committee backlogs. The point of this addition is to create multiple assessment options or tracks to process candidates more

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efficiently. In addition to the conference credentialing committee, specialized church-planting and ethnic assessments were mentioned. What was not discussed is how far these alternative tracks would extend: assessment only, or the granting of credentials?

- “Ordained minister authority [to grant] provisional license” (7 individuals and 2 groups): This suggestion was based on the need for flexibility in the case of rapid church multiplication. For example, requiring all house church leaders to go through the conference credentialing process would hinder the expansion of a movement.
- “Mentoring throughout process” (11 individuals and 3 groups): The key issue here is the need for licensees to receive mentoring on a relational basis, not one imposed by the conference. It is critically important that licensees are not ignored as they work through the process.

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Identifying the Components of Change: Assessment of Ordination and Licensure

Ordination

This lifetime credential traditionally has been granted to those who have met the training requirements of “full-time, vocational” ministry, usually following a probationary period (e.g. 3 years for transfers from other denominations) or a preparatory license.

Unfortunately, there is a danger of seeing ordination as a kind of tenure, the culmination of study and training after which there is little if any formal oversight. In addition, there can be an underlying sense of entitlement: the right to marry, bury, baptize, officiate at Holy Communion, etc. Ordination in this negative sense carries the vestiges of the clergy-laity distinction and effectively denies the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. (Defenders of this basically sacerdotal view will point to the Old Testament ordination of Aaron and his descendants, and even refer to apostolic succession in which the ordained priest represents the bishop, who in turn represents the original apostles.)

So what then might ordination mean if we are to take seriously the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers? What “special” responsibilities and rights accompany it? Is it correct to claim that “ordination is evil”¹ because it creates a caste system? No, because ordination was instituted by God in the Old Testament, and therefore must never be dismissed out-of-hand. Nevertheless, it is curious that Paul and the other New Testament writers don’t directly address the issue of the Old Testament priesthood apart from the superiority of Jesus’ high priesthood versus the Aaronic priesthood.² But this doesn’t abrogate ordained priesthood *per se*; it merely demonstrates how Jesus’ self-sacrifice on our behalf fulfills and surpasses the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, which foreshadowed salvation in Christ.

Can it be argued that the Old Testament priesthood (i.e. the ordination of a few) foreshadows the New Testament understanding of the “priesthood of all believers” (i.e. the ordination of the many)? In this sense, *all* Spirit-filled believers are empowered and gifted by the Holy Spirit to serve as a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6). This certainly seems to lie at the root of Paul’s understanding of spiritual giftedness (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12), and clearly is evident on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit “tabernacled” in *each* of the believers awaiting His gift (Acts 2:1-4).

But what of leadership? Are there lines of authority, even hierarchy, in the New Testament model? Unquestionably Paul felt the need to defend his authority on several occasions. Not everyone can be an overseer or shepherd, to use another example. How are these leaders identified? The qualifications Paul provides in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 help to clarify the character aspects, but little is said about actual functions or initiation into service.

¹ Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God*, p. 242.

² Cf. Hebrews 6:20-8:13.

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Rather than representing “tenure,” ordination should mean a greater responsibility and empowerment to oversee existing ministries and initiate new ones. There should be continual accountability to the whole Church and other leaders, and there should be evidence of leadership development and ministry training of others.

How can our presbyterial structure become more organic and egalitarian? (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:27-31; Ephesians 4:11-12)?

Ephesians 4:11-12 describes the collective role of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers as equippers of God’s people “for works of ministry.” In organizational terms, this represents a non-hierarchical structure that is egalitarian, organic, and interdependent, while our presbyterial structure calls for pastors, elders and deacons – in which only the pastors are credentialed. A major argument in favor of adopting an organic model is that the pastor/elder/deacon setup can easily lead to a spiritual/material dichotomy. This can occur because deacons primarily are responsible for budgets and financial oversight, and trustees (a completely non-biblical office) focus on property issues. Elders have the so-called “spiritual responsibilities” as they work with the pastor(s). While this arrangement is pragmatic, it’s clear that too often church boards are focused on finance and property rather than discerning and following God’s mission for the church locally, regionally, and globally. In no way does this call into question the sincerity or spirituality of individual deacons and trustees, but church leaders should consider this simple question: Do institutional concerns take priority over mission, or vice versa?

Organic, egalitarian leadership seems completely incompatible with typical CGGC church leadership structures, at least at first blush. However, the board of elders (including the pastor[s]) provides an opportunity for churches to utilize the diversity of spiritual gifts in leadership roles. Granted, it is obviously unwise to have formal, elected positions of “apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd and teacher.” But we trust that God has placed these callings in the church, and we can seek out His direction in uncovering them and deploying them into ministry. Perhaps it will be a slow start – only two or three working together – but one suspects a great deal can happen if elders take their spiritual leadership in the church seriously ... and if the board and congregation support them in doing so!

License

Licensing in particular has had numerous distinctions throughout the years: annual, lay, with or without privilege, permanent, provisional, etc. One of the early conclusions of the symposium was to simplify the license by eliminating the qualifications “with” or “without privilege.” For some (but not all) licensees, a license is preparation for ordination. Another key desire was to allow for rapid multiplication of leaders, which under our current system would be held up by credentialing bodies’ overloaded schedules. These problems of complexity and backlogging are only superficial ones, however. The more important issue has to do with permission and flexibility: To what degree are churches and aspiring leaders limited by our structure? To what degree are they pushed forward and encouraged? Do we unwittingly limit or quench the Spirit in His movement among and through us?