

500 CHAPTER I – MINISTERIAL QUALIFICATIONS AND WORK

Historical Introduction (adapted from the 1744 Conference Minutes of the Methodist Societies)

General Directions

a. Be diligent. Never be unemployed; nor triflingly employed. Follow the rules of strict economy in the use of time, even in the discharge of important duties. Let necessity, and not enjoyment determine. Redeem the time.

b. Be serious. Be earnest. Avoid lightness, jesting, and foolish talking. Your motto must be: “Holiness to the Lord.”

c. Converse discreetly and conduct yourself prudently with the other sex.

d. Believe evil of no one without substantial evidence. Put the best construction on everything.

e. Speak evil of no one, because our work, especially, would eat as doth a canker. Keep your thoughts within your own breast, till you meet the person concerned.

f. Counsel with those under your care concerning those matters in their lives that may be weakening their spiritual development and nullifying their Christian witness.

g. Be yourself, avoiding all affectation. As was the Master, so must the preacher of the gospel be—the servant of all.

h. Be ashamed of all sin and of everything that tends to its commission.

i. Be punctual. Work by rule. Do not amend the rules, but keep them, not for fear, but for conscience’s sake.

j. You are a shepherd. Your commission from the Chief Shepherd is soul-saving. This will require the consecration of all time and talent – to spend and be spent in this work. You are to look after and visit not only those who welcome you but any who are without hope or who need counsel and instruction of Christ’s ambassador. It is not the end of your calling to preach only or to take care of this or that society; but to lead as many sinners to repentance and salvation as possible and to build them up in that holiness, without which they cannot see the Lord.

k. As a preacher of the Evangelical Congregational Church you are expected to act in all things, not according to your own will or pleasure, but as a faithful son of the gospel. As such it is your duty to employ your time in the manner in which our rules direct: in preaching, in visiting from house to house, in reading, meditation, and prayer. Above all, if you labor with us in the Lord’s vineyard, it is needful that you do that chapter of the work which is assigned you and at those times and places which it is adjudged most to His glory and the furtherance of His kingdom.

501 PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

Our philosophy of pastoral ministry is founded upon what Paul writes in Ephesians 4:11-13, ‘It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.’ We affirm that God gifts, calls, and sets apart particular individuals to positions of leadership in ministry.

We also affirm that all persons born of God through faith in Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit have been given ministry gifts that God intends to be used for his glory. According to New Testament teaching, the Christian faith is lived in the community of the church, where worship and witness are embodied through the spiritual gifts of its members. What allows this system to function properly is that ‘the same God works all of them in all men’ (1 Corinthians 12:6).

It is the responsibility of pastoral leaders to work with followers of Jesus Christ in the church to help believers discover and develop their gifts, and then deploy believers in building the kingdom.

502 SPIRITUAL QUALIFICATIONS

A pastor must first be called, set apart, and gifted by the Holy Spirit for ministry. He must also possess and develop a corresponding personal character.

As a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he must know he is saved and possesses peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. He must know that the Holy Spirit fills his heart with love and is actively at work bringing demonstrated victories over sin. Sin must no longer rule in his heart and life. Since souls are perishing for whom Christ died, the preacher must be called by God to go and proclaim the ‘good news’ of the saving grace which brings salvation to any who will repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38). ‘Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful’ (1 Corinthians 4:2).

503 EVIDENCE OF A CALL TO PREACH

We affirm it is God alone who calls men to preach. We also affirm that the church of Jesus Christ plays a valuable role in affirming that an individual has been called to this sacred office. When a man believes he is called into the ministry, he must work out the confirmation of his call within the context of the church.

The Evangelical Congregational Church will work side-by-side with one who believes he is called into the ministry from the time he indicates his belief of his call until he is ordained or no longer seeks to be ordained in the Evangelical Congregational Church.

Demonstrating evidence of a call to preach begins in the home church of one who believes he possesses this call. The home church should offer such a man opportunities to conduct and/or participate in religious services, work in the evangelistic outreach of the church, and exercise his particular spiritual gifts. While he is exercising his gifts, this person should also be thoroughly acquainting himself with all paragraphs of the *Discipline*. The full process through which the applicant will proceed is outlined in the Conference Rules.

503.1 Personal Experience

Does the applicant have peace with God? Is the love of God abiding in his heart and is it demonstrated in his relationships with other individuals? What is his relationship with the Holy Spirit? Is there evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in his life? Are his life and conversation pure? Is he concerned with the spread of the gospel and the conversion of the lost?

503.2 Thirst for Knowledge

Is the applicant studious? Is he devoted first and foremost to the study of the Bible and to understanding its meaning? Does he love to learn as much as he can about this world while at the same time understanding that his call to building the kingdom of God will always be his primary calling?

503.3 Effective Preaching and Teaching

Does his teaching consistently reach the hearts and minds of his audience? Does the Holy Spirit bear witness in believers that God's word has been effectually communicated? Is the message culturally relevant? Has anyone been converted through his proclamation of the gospel message? Does he consistently exhibit proper exegesis and deliver high quality messages making scriptural truths relevant to the audience within various settings? Do those who regularly sit under his ministry grow more healthy and vibrant in their faith through his teaching and preaching ministry?

503.4 Gifts and Qualifications

Does he give indication that he will mature over the coming years in the use of his gifts and abilities under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit? Does he possess common sense and good judgment? Is he flexible and able to adapt? Does he possess the gift of spiritual discernment? Is his view of the plan of redemption and salvation scriptural? Is his preaching such that people want to listen?

Summary: In all cases where there is a fair degree of clarity that the applicant has demonstrated this evidence, the Evangelical Congregational Church will affirm the man's call. He will be encouraged and guided to complete the process that leads to ordination and service in our denomination.

504 INTEGRITY IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

All children of God are called to lives of holiness. It is only natural to expect that our pastors should strive to be persons of the highest moral integrity in every area of their lives. This includes: their relationships with God, their family, and their community. Our pastors should endeavor to bring every aspect of their life under the lordship of Christ, and be living examples of a life lived in step with God's Spirit. Pastors should regularly assess: their personal spiritual formation; their ministry to their own family; their work ethic and time management; their conduct with the opposite sex and children; their thought life; their financial management; and their physical well-being.

510 CHAPTER II – CLASSIFICATION OF MINISTERS

510.1 Questions to applicants

Candidates applying for credentials shall be examined by answering the following questions:

1. Do you believe yourself to be divinely called to preach the gospel?
2. Have you obtained the pardon of your sins and peace with God, through faith in Christ?
3. Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?
4. Do you earnestly desire and seek to have the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit, in such a measure that you may have victory over every sin?
5. Are you acquainted with the doctrines and standards of Christian practice as articulated in the *Discipline* of the Evangelical Congregational Church?
6. Will you observe and defend them?

7. Will you be an example of the believers by keeping your life pure, bringing every aspect of your life under the Lordship of Christ, living in step with God's Spirit, and conduct yourself in a manner consistent with the biblical standards as expressed in the Christian Practice section of the Discipline?

If the applicant satisfactorily answers all the foregoing questions, the National Conference may, by a majority of the members, grant the appropriate credentials to the candidates.

511 THE OFFICE AND FUNCTIONS OF AN APPROVED CANDIDATE FOR THE MINISTRY

An Approved Candidate for the ministry is one who is receiving guidance in training for and clarification of the call to ministry. An Approved Candidate for ministry may function by rendering preaching service under the direction of his pastor and/or the Stationing Committee. He is also to assist the local pastor as directed by him.

512 THE OFFICE AND FUNCTIONS OF A LICENSED CANDIDATE AND LICENSED PASTOR

512.1 Licensed Candidate

A Licensed Candidate is one who is fully persuaded of his call to pastoral ministry but is not assigned to a church. A Licensed Candidate carries the additional privilege of being considered as available for an appointment to an Evangelical Congregational Church.

512.2 Licensed Pastor

A Licensed Pastor is a stationed pastor who has limited or no ministerial experience. He remains a Licensed Pastor at least until he has completed his educational requirements for ordination. As a stationed pastor permission is granted to administer the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion and to perform weddings as long as his assignment continues. He may officially use the written title "Reverend."

Additionally, a stationed assistant/associate pastor may perform the full pastoral functions under the direction of his senior pastor.

513 THE OFFICE AND FUNCTIONS OF AN ELDER

An Elder is a Licensed Pastor who has completed the educational requirements of National Conference and has faithfully discharged the duties of a Licensed Pastor or his previous office(s) for a period of not less than three years. Once the ordination vows have been assumed and the candidate is ordained, his full pastoral functions and title are made permanent.

513.1 Missionaries

A Licensed Pastor serving as a missionary may become an applicant for Elder's Orders upon completion of the educational requirements of his National Conference and three (3) full years of service on a field approved by the Global Ministries Commission. An applicant serving in an area outside the United States, who is unable to be present at the session when his application is considered, may be voted the rights, privileges, and duties of an Elder in absentia. The Orders shall be withheld until the ordination ritual is performed.

513.2 Serving Boards/Commissions

A Licensed Pastor who serves as a full-time employee of a Board or Commission of our denomination for three (3) full years and has completed the educational requirements of his National Conference may become an applicant for Elder's Orders.

514 THE OFFICE AND FUNCTIONS OF ITINERANTS

The Itinerancy is a self-disciplining body of ordained Elders who accept the priority of the cause of Christ in service to the Lord and who are committed to a lifetime of service under the authority of the EC Church.

514.1 Ministers

Itinerants are those ministers who have completed the educational and service requirements of the Conference, have attained full ordination as an Elder, and have been admitted to the Itinerancy by a two-thirds majority vote of the members of the Itinerancy present at a Conference session. These men unquestionably possess the calling, gifts, graces and essential qualities for pastoral ministry in the EC Church. Members of the Itinerancy understand and accept the responsibility and sacrifice of willingly moving from church to church when assigned. Because the full pastoral functions and title of a minister are made permanent at the time of ordination, a minister is eligible for admission into the Itinerancy at the time of his ordination.

514.2 Missionaries

An Elder serving as a missionary under appointment of the Global Ministries Commission, who has been voted the rights, privileges, and duties of an Elder, is eligible for admission into the Itinerancy by a two-thirds vote of the majority of the Itinerancy present at a Conference session.

514.3 Serving Boards/Commissions

An Elder employed by a Board or Commission of the church is eligible for admission into the Itinerancy by a two-thirds vote of the members of the Itinerancy present at a Conference session.

514.4 Service Commitment

By acceptance into the Itinerancy, a minister is making a commitment to the Evangelical Congregational Church to serve as assigned until released for good and sufficient reason by the Conference. Any minister resigning from service before the conclusion of the year of pastoral assignment shall be considered to have left irregularly unless an agreement is made with the Stationing Committee concerning early release.

515 SUPERANNUATED PREACHERS

A Superannuated Preacher is an Itinerant who has reached retirement age, as determined by the Benefits Corporation, or has become physically incapacitated and/or for some other reason has been rendered unable to serve a charge, whose application for retirement has been approved by the Conference and who has been transferred by the Conference to the Superannuated list. A Superannuated Preacher, to become a beneficiary of the Benefits Corporation, must be approved by that Corporation.

516 SUPERNUMERARY PREACHERS

Any Itinerant minister of the National Conference who has withdrawn from pastoral ministry due to:

1. physical, emotional, or mental incapacitation such that he has been rendered unable to serve a charge; or
2. accepting a full-time position in any other sphere of service other than those listed under the classification "Active Ministers in Related Fields" shall be placed in supernumerary relationship. Non-itinerant ordained ministers who withdraw from pastoral ministry for any of the above reasons shall be classified as "Inactive" within their designated classification under Ordained Elder.

517 THE OFFICE AND FUNCTIONS OF A LOCAL CANDIDATE, LOCAL PASTOR, AND LOCAL ELDER

A Local Candidate is one who is licensed to serve in the Word as occasion may require and opportunity offers, but who is not yet stationed. The Local Pastor and Local Elder serve at the direction of the stationed lead pastor or the Stationing Committee.

518 THE OFFICE AND FUNCTIONS OF AN APPROVED PASTOR

This office provides a limited ministerial credential to a man who is not a member of the Evangelical Congregational Church and has no ministerial credentials with other denominations, but is deemed acceptable for pastoral ministry. He shall be required to apply for a regular license after one year of service as an approved pastor.

519 THE OFFICE AND FUNCTIONS OF A CERTIFIED LAY PREACHER

This person is called and gifted to preach the Word but not serve as a pastor.

520 SPECIALIZED MINISTRY

Qualified men and women can be granted denominational credentials in areas of specialized ministry. Areas of ministry included, but not limited to, in this category are: evangelism, Bible teaching, Christian education, youth ministry, women's ministry, prison ministry, visitation ministry, counseling, nursing home chaplaincy, hospital chaplaincy, hospice chaplaincy and marketplace chaplaincy.

521 PREACHER-IN-CHARGE

An Elder shall be designated by the Stationing Committee when he is entrusted with the oversight of a church to which no regular pastoral appointment has been made.

When an interim or permanent pastor is not immediately available, laymen may be used to supply the pulpit and meet basic pastoral care needs. A preacher-in-charge shall be designated and shall administer the sacraments of the church and conduct other such services that require a credentialed pastor.

A preacher-in-charge may also be designated when a church has been planted or restarted and a permanent church planter has not yet been appointed by the Church Planting Commission. The preacher-in-charge shall be designated by the Stationing Committee in consultation with the Church Planting Commission

and shall give pastoral oversight to the plant/restart including the administration of the sacraments and other such services that requires a credentialed pastor.