

Called to Serve

SUMMER 2022

■ FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

Why Ministerial Credentials Are Important

BY DONNA BARRETT

I love ordination services. They mix pomp and circumstance, celebration and a teachable moment. Ordinees often feel a Christmas-morning level of joy at the recognition of their calling. Reflecting the momentousness of the occasion, district officers and staff work all year to get to the point of celebrating these newly ordained ministers, as well as of those receiving licensed and certified credentials.

By the time you receive this issue of *Called to Serve*, I will have preached at ordination services in eight of our Fellowship's district councils. As general secretary of the Assemblies of God, my job is largely administrative, stewarding the ministerial credentials of over 37,500 ministers. So you can imagine my enthusiasm when I get to meet the faces behind the paperwork and participate in the joy of their ordinations.

When I minister at district councils or in local churches, I enjoy listening to district leaders, ministers, and the laypeople they serve. Among the many questions I'm asked, several often arise about ministerial credentials. Fresh off the thrill of participating in ordination services, I'd like to share those questions and my answers with you in this article.

What Are Ministerial Credentials?

Article 11 of our Statement of Fundamental Truths says:

A divinely called and scripturally ordained ministry has been provided by our Lord for the fourfold purpose of leading the Church in: (1) evangelization of the world (Mark 16:15–20), (2) worship of God (John 4:23–24), (3) building a Body of saints being perfected in the image of His Son (Ephesians 4:11,16), and (4) meeting human need with ministries of love and compassion (Psalm 112:9; Galatians 2:10; 6:10; James 1:27).

Ministerial credentials recognize the call God has placed on some within the body of Christ to lead in vocational ministry in fulfillment of these purposes.

Since its inception 108 years ago, our Fellowship has provided a process by which such called individuals can be recognized and held accountable for gospel ministry. The Assemblies of God recognizes three levels of credentialing: certified, licensed, and ordained. These three levels reflect

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a common-sense practice of moving people sequentially to greater levels of preparation, authority, and responsibility in ministry.

I'd use three words to describe our levels of credentialing: Credentialed ministers show the *promise* of effectiveness in ministry. (That's the word our Bylaws actually use.) Licensed ministers are *preparing* for greater effectiveness. And ordained ministers have *proven* effectiveness in the ministry.

The purpose of certification and license is to launch called people into ministry while they work toward ordination. Our intent has never been to see ministers park on those levels of certified or licensed. The process was designed as a pipeline for ordination.

Why Are Credentials Important?

It is important for several reasons.

First, ministerial credentials are important because the Lord has provided His Church with "a divinely called and scripturally ordained ministry." Ordination is serious business. This is why Paul warned Timothy, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" (1 Timothy 5:22, cf. 4:14). It is also why James wrote, "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1).

Second, credentials are important because they are the outward confirmation of your inward *(continued on Page 2)*

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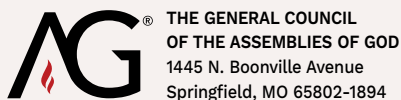
Ordained Minister Under 40 Years
of Age

A. Elizabeth Grant

Ordained Female

Samuel M. Huddleston

African-American



Why Ministerial Credentials Are Important (continued from Page 1)

calling. This is especially true of ordination. Think back to your experience of calling, whether at the altar, a summer camp, or the solitude of your quiet time. Wasn't it a powerful experience?

It was also a personal experience, however. There may come a time when you question your calling under the pressures of life and ministry. If that happens, you can always look back on ordination and say, "It wasn't just my personal experience. Other people recognized God's hand on my life, too!" Their confirmation of your calling can encourage you to keep on keeping on!

Third, credentials embed ministers in a network of relationships, resources, and mutual accountability. I didn't fully appreciate the value of being credentialed by the AG until I watched a friend in a nondenominational ministry go through a crisis. He didn't have access to the kinds of resources I did, including legal expertise, policy advice, built-in networks to hire staff, and published resources.

Fourth, credentials identify you both within and outside of your tribe, among the body of Christ and as you interact in the secular marketplace. It sends a message to others that you have met qualifications for leadership in your profession and are accountable.

While it is true that people can get a degree in accounting, they're only recognized as CPAs when they pass their certified public accounting exam. The same is true of law school graduates. They only become *lawyers* when they pass the bar exam.

By analogy, credentials — especially ordination — show to others that you have been recognized as a *minister*.

Fifth, building on the analogies to accountants and lawyers, ministerial credentials give you authority to perform select tasks. They allow you to officiate at weddings, for example, and to gain special access at hospitals and prison wards.

Within the Assemblies of God, ministerial credentials give you a vote at sectional, district, and national meetings. They make you eligible to serve on denominational committees and teams.

I am often asked, "Why do I need a ministry credential to do what I'm already doing?" As Pentecostals, we believe that all Christians are spiritually gifted. Not all gifted people need credentials, however.

Which leads to a more specific question: "If I'm already certified or licensed, why do I need to be ordained?" I usually answer that question with a question: "Why not prepare yourself for all the ways God may want to use you in the future?"

Going on to ordination prepares you for what God has in store for you next.

Next Steps

If you're reading this newsletter, you probably already hold ministerial credentials. (*Called to Serve* is the official AG minister's letter, after all.) Now that I've reminded you of what ministerial credentials are and why they're important, here are some next steps of application you can take:






1. Recommit yourself to the ministry purposes for which the Lord has called you — evangelism, worship, discipleship, and compassion.
2. Create opportunities for others to hear God’s call on their lives.
3. Notice God’s calling on others around you, young people in particular, and mentor them in their journey toward credentialed ministry.
4. If you are a certified or licensed minister, prayerfully consider advancing to the next level of credentialing. The leaders in our 66 district offices stand ready and willing to help you move forward in the process.

5. Finally, if you know of ministers who have been recently ordained, honor them. Affirm what you see God doing in their lives and through their ministries. I look forward to celebrating with you at a future ordination service!



Donna Barrett is general secretary of the Assemblies of God.



Called to Serve
Ministerial List Changes
MARCH 31, 2022, TO MAY 31, 2022

Ordained

NEW

Johna Beth Aurora, CO
Albert David M. Fryberg, ME
Albert Joseph W. Van Ordy Street, AZ
Afran, Eli, Montgomery, TX
Allen, John Hank, Warrensburg, MO
Allen, Deborah F., Warrensburg, MO
Alvarado, Paula C., Westminster, CO
Anderson, Connor J., Jamaica, NY
Andrews, Catherine N., Magnolia, AR
Aquila, Susana, Fremont, CA
Austerman, Ingrid R., St. George, UT

Castano, Diego H., Las Vegas, NV
Castro, Emmanuel P., Stone Valley, CA
Castro, Rafael H., San Francisco, MI
Cavanagh, Nancy, Pickens, SC
Chang, Jason H., Bethesda, NJ
Chavis, Shawn, Shannon, NC
Chastanet, Deborah J., Winter Haven, FL
Chenault, Amanda J., Kent, MI
Cheng, Marlene, Millersville, CA
Choi, Lindsay M., Greensboro, NC
Christie, Rebekah J., Florida, NJ
Ciniseo-John, Gertrude K., Wallham, MA
Clemens, David L., Wichita, MO
Clement, Lorie, Miami Gardens, FL
Coffey, Robert J., Nevada, NV
Coffman, Danielle J., Mangum, DE
Coffman, Don, Montgomery, DE
Coffman, Kyle A., Knoxville, TN
Coffman, Mark R., Rochester, WA
Coffman, Francis R., Knoxville, TN
Collins, Phillip R., Greensboro, NC
Collins, Vanessa L., San Francisco, CA
Coof, L. Michael, Prescott, AZ
Conroy, Jim Jr., Lake, CA
Cord, Lisa Lee, Apple, UT

Ministerial List Changes

To view Ministerial List Changes (MLC) online, log in to your account at agpassport.ag.org. Click on the links for Ministers Letter, then View Current Issue with Ministerial Listings. An email will notify you when a new Ministers Letter with the MLC has been posted.

Religious Freedom Helps Keep the Doors Open for the Gospel

BY KRISTEN WAGGONER

As Jesus closed His earthly ministry, He charged His disciples with this critical mission: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). This memorable directive serves as the Church’s mission statement. For over two millennia, the body of Christ has spread the gospel, made disciples, and expanded God’s kingdom throughout the world.

While the gospel can advance in environments that embrace freedom or include persecution, the Kingdom, society at large, and individuals all benefit when there is robust religious freedom and free speech — two fundamental rights the United States Constitution and state constitutions protect. These freedoms serve as a bulwark against government tyranny and the foundation for self-government.

These rights also promote human flourishing. Countries with more religious freedom have less poverty, war and violence. They enjoy more economic freedom, safeguard a free press, and compassionately protect the vulnerable in their midst. These countries also ensure people can freely share the gospel and the beauty of God’s created order.

Governments that prioritize religious freedom also protect the authentic diversity and dignity of citizens. By affirming an individual’s capacity and responsibility to follow his or her conscience, our own government has — imperfectly at times — demonstrated an appropriate restraint that has benefitted people of all faiths and no faith at all.

But not all Americans appreciate the genius and humility built into our Constitution. They’ve embraced the depressing falsehood that Christianity and objective truth claims are merely power plays, designed to sideline others. It’s a worldview that manufactures victims, destroys genuine diversity, and pits neighbors against one another. It’s also a worldview with devastating practical consequences.

Understanding the Threats

Unfortunately, churches and religious organizations face increasing pressure to compromise their biblical principles as activists use law and policy to demand conformity.

Religious organizations face increasing threats to their freedom to minister and operate according to their faith. For example, some governments now compel churches to cover abortion and sex-reassignment procedures in

employee health insurance plans. Others prohibit churches from hiring only people of like faith if that faith includes certain beliefs about human sexuality or when life begins.

Government officials increasingly attach clauses to public benefits, programs, licensure, and accreditation schemes that exclude organizations holding Christian beliefs.

And an increasing body of proposed legislation — like the deceptively titled Equality Act — threatens churches’ ability to hire those who adhere to biblical principles.

Many of these challenges come from sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) laws. These laws elevate sexual orientation and gender identity to protected class status

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akin to race. Proponents claim such policies are needed to stop discrimination, but the laws are often used to target and discriminate against individuals and organizations who affirm biblical beliefs about marriage and sexuality. The fallout is immense.

Christians are justified in seeking protection for their churches and other organizations. But the harms spread much further — including to private citizens with no allegiance to the Christian faith.

To achieve their ends, SOGI laws sacrifice parental rights, free speech, the rights of healthcare providers to prioritize ethical treatment, the well-being of children, and women’s rights to privacy, safety, and equal opportunity. Activists have introduced or passed these laws at all levels of government.

At the federal level, the proposed Equality Act threatens to undermine existing legal protections for people of faith. These proposals mirror SOGI laws already passed at the state level. For example, the Virginia Values Act, enacted in July 2020, imposes fines of up to \$100,000 for every time a church expresses biblical beliefs about marriage on its own websites. This law also compels churches, religious schools, and Christian ministries to hire employees who do not share their beliefs.

The threats are not hypothetical; officials are already applying similar laws across the country. Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) has challenged the Virginia law in court.

In Seattle, a faith-based rescue mission is in court for operating according to its biblical beliefs and seeking to hire only employees who will promote its mission to evangelize.

Seattle's Union Gospel Mission has faithfully served the city's homeless by providing them food, shelter, addiction recovery, job placement, and legal services since the Great Depression. The ministry's religious convictions and evangelical mission are the foundation for everything it does, including its hiring practices. Thus, the Mission employs only those who share its religious beliefs.

But after a prospective employee sued, testifying he sought to change the Mission's beliefs, the Washington State Supreme Court held that state law could punish churches and religious organizations for not hiring people who do not share their faith. ADF and Ellis, Li & McKinstry PLLC, a Seattle firm, represent the Mission.

Every generation will contest freedom, just as it contests power. As Christian leaders, it is our sacred privilege and responsibility to steward the freedoms God has given us for the next generation.

God can and does work through suffering, and of all institutions, the Church should know best the pain of persecution. We expect that our neighbors will sometimes oppose our beliefs and ethics. But we do our children and communities a disservice if we fail to protect the God-given, constitutionally-protected rights of ourselves and others.

A nation that silences the gospel and the teaching of biblical principles will not only undermine its future, but it will also inflict great suffering on families and individuals.

By preserving the authenticity and religious practices of our churches, schools, and nonprofits, we provide genuine diversity of thought and offer a place of safety and restoration for our neighbors who have been harmed by the culture's prevailing orthodoxy.

Best Practices for Churches

Prudent action is a vital part of stewarding freedom. There are six practical steps your church can take to preserve religious liberty as you make disciples and minister to your community. (These matters are complex, so we recommend consulting an attorney who specializes in religious freedom issues.)

1. Create a statement of faith. A statement of faith is the foundational document for every church. The statement expresses the church's core religious beliefs and explains why the church holds those beliefs.

A statement not only provides clarification for potential members, but it also serves as evidence of those beliefs if they are questioned in a lawsuit. Adopting a statement of faith makes it more likely a court will conclude a church acted on its well-documented and sincere religious beliefs, rather than an improper motive.

Because of its importance, the statement of faith should appear in the church's constitution or bylaws.

One of the many benefits of being affiliated with the Assemblies of God is that your constitution or bylaws should already include our "16 Fundamental Truths," which meets this recommendation of adopting a statement of faith. The Assemblies of God also provides recommendations for General Council affiliated church governance minimums.

2. Create statements on marriage and sexuality. Issues concerning marriage and sexuality now regularly confront church leaders. Churches are receiving requests to use their facilities for same-sex ceremonies or to endorse those views by admitting individuals into church membership who reject the biblical sexual ethic.

Issues involving gender identity are also on the rise. How will your church respond, for example, if a man wants to join a women's prayer or support group? Or if a male student identifies as a female and wants to room with females at a church camp? These issues deserve serious consideration before the situation arises.

Given these and other issues, it is important that churches develop a clear statement on marriage and sexuality. The Assemblies of God has position papers on these topics — "Homosexuality, Marriage, and Sexual Identity" and "Transgenderism, Transsexuality, and Gender Identity" — that churches can adopt or use as references to create their own statements.

Such statements may exist within a statement of faith, but churches can also adopt these statements as separate policies provided the religious basis for the beliefs are clearly articulated.

3. Create a statement on the sanctity of human life. Churches should consider adopting a statement about the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death. This helps your church declare God's truth that life is precious and worthy of preservation and protection.

A statement like this also reminds employees and volunteers of their commitment to the sanctity of life as they serve in your ministry.

The Assemblies of God has a position paper on this subject, "Sanctity of Human Life: Abortion and Reproductive

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Issues,” that local congregations can adopt or use as a reference to draft their own statement to include in a policy.

4. Create a statement of final authority for matters of faith and conduct.

It is impossible to anticipate every doctrinal dispute a church might encounter, and it’s important for churches to respond in a legally defensible way. So each church should identify (1) the source of religious authority for matters of faith and conduct, and (2) the final human interpreter of that source for the church.

This statement makes clear that authority resides in a designated individual or group (e.g., pastor or board of deacons) authorized to speak for your ministry and state its position on any disputed issue. Ultimately, this type of statement should provide a catch-all to cover unforeseeable threats that might arise in the future.

5. Create clear job descriptions that incorporate your church’s statement of faith and code of conduct.

The First Amendment and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 have long protected a church’s ability to hire “coreligionists,” individuals who share the same faith or beliefs. Although this coreligionist principle is under attack, the Supreme Court recently solidified the ability of churches to make employment decisions regarding their ministerial employees without government interference. We still recommend churches create written job descriptions for each employment position.

Job descriptions should explain how each position furthers your church’s religious mission, what the religious responsibilities of the position include, and what qualifications are necessary for the role.

Additionally, as Christians or coreligionists, we are not called merely to believe the gospel; we are called to act on it as we abide in Christ. So the qualifications section of each job description should require the employee to affirm your church’s statement of faith and to abide by your church’s code of conduct.

Some Christian ministries have lost the freedom to select employees who live consistently with their faith because they hired individuals who did not share their fundamental beliefs or ethics. Don’t let that happen to your church.

6. Create a facility use policy. Churches can strengthen their religious liberty protections and, ultimately, their mission by adopting a facility use policy that outlines the religious nature of the building and prohibits uses that conflict with the church’s beliefs.

A facility use policy should provide clear evidence of the

church’s beliefs and practices regarding use of its property and why certain practices or activities are not allowed on the premises. It should apply to all facility uses, whether it is a long-term or one-time use, by members or non-members, or for a fee or gratuity.

Churches that charge outside organizations to use their facilities should do so at less-than-market rates. Even when charging less-than-market rates, churches are at greatest risk when they allow commercial or for-profit entities to use church facilities. Churches should seek legal counsel before making such commitments.

God is our faithful Provider, and we are to be good caretakers of His provision — including our religious freedom and free speech rights.

Freedom to Serve

God is our faithful Provider, and we are to be good caretakers of His provision — including our religious freedom and free speech rights.

To best protect your church and steward religious freedom, remember the “3 C’s: winsomely *communicate* what your church believes to your congregation and your community, prepare written *core* documents identifying your beliefs and religious practices, and *consistently* apply those documents.

God is the Author of freedom, and we ultimately find freedom in Christ. Religious freedom in this country is a secondary and temporary blessing, but it is not unimportant.

Religious freedom allows us to share more readily the story of our ultimate freedom from the burden of sin and that helps others.

As Christians, we should eagerly embrace religious freedom as a gift from God because it is good for humanity, it helps us better serve God and others, and it furthers our mission, which is helping keep the doors open for the gospel.

The information in this article should not be construed as legal advice. For specific questions or to obtain legal advice or sample documents, we recommend becoming members of Alliance Defending Freedom’s Church Alliance. For more information, visit ADFChurchAlliance.org or contact Alliance Defending Freedom at 1-800-835-5233.



Kristen Waggoner serves as legal counsel for The General Council of the Assemblies of God and general counsel for Alliance Defending Freedom

AG Ethnic Fellowships

BY GEORGE P. WOOD

QUESTION: I heard about a historic meeting of ethnic fellowship officers that just took place in Springfield, Missouri. What exactly is an ethnic fellowship? How many do we have? What ethnic groups have a fellowship with the AG? How can I learn more?

ANSWER: The Assemblies of God is a diverse Fellowship. Forty-four percent of adherents belong to racial and ethnic minorities, including Hispanic (22.1%), Black (10.9%), Asian/Pacific Islander (5%), Native American (1.5%), and other (4.5%).

Article V, Section 8 of the Bylaws empowers the Executive Presbytery to form ethnic fellowships for the purposes of “exchanging information, facilitating evangelism, and establishing churches.” Ethnic fellowships are not districts, however. Their members are credentialed and their churches are chartered by their geographical or language district. The fellowships have representatives on the Executive Presbytery and General Presbytery, as well as on district presbyteries.

Currently, there are 24 ethnic fellowships within the AG:

- African AG Fellowship, USA
- Arabic Assemblies of God Fellowship, USA
- National Black Fellowship of the AG
- Caribbean Fellowship of the Assemblies of God
- National Chinese Fellowship of the AG
- National Deaf Culture Fellowship of the AG
- Ethiopian Fellowship of the AG

- National Fijian Fellowship of the AG
- Filipino-American of Christian Fellowship of the AG
- Ghanaian AG Fellowship, USA
- Haitian American Fellowship of the AG
- Hmong National Fellowship of the AG
- **AG India Fellowship of America**
- Indonesian Fellowship of the AG
- Japanese Fellowship of the Assemblies of God
- National Jewish Fellowship of the AG
- Korean-English Fellowship of the AG
- Myanmar AG Fellowship, USA
- Native American Fellowship of the AG
- Nigerian Assemblies of God Fellowship, USA
- Romanian Alianta of the AG
- Southern Asian Fellowship of the AG
- US Tongan AG Fellowship
- Vietnamese Fellowship of the AG

The Office of Ethnic Relations serves as the liaison between the national office and these ethnic fellowships. Directed by Dennis Rivera, its mission is to be a bridge between “the national office and ethnic minority and immigrant ministers, churches, and Ethnic/Language Fellowship Groups in the United States.”

For more information about ethnic fellowships in the Assemblies of God, including links to specific ones, visit EthnicRelations.AG.org.



George P. Wood is executive editor of Assemblies of God Publications.

AG Foster Care Network Conference



Every year, at least 400,000 American children move through the nation's foster care system. The Assemblies of God Foster Care Network (AGFCN) believes

that local churches can change the lives and eternal destinies of these children through effective, substantial foster care ministry.

On October 6–7, AGFCN will hold its first conference at Calvary Church in Irving, Texas. Pastors, district/network leaders, and interested laypeople are invited to attend. We want to network, educate, and equip our Fellowship to become more involved in helping hurting children in our communities.

Visit AGFosterCare.network/conference for more information.



Save the Dates!

Seek and Save

is a 5-day collaborative event designed to bring hope to distressed American communities. Led by General Treasurer

Choco De Jesus, Seek and Save includes elements such as pre-event prayer and volunteer training, street evangelism, school assemblies, compassion outreaches, and combined-church worship services.

Save the dates for these two Seek and Save outreaches in 2023:

- **May 16–20, 2023, in Detroit, Michigan**
- **May 30–June 3, 2023, in Newark, New Jersey**

Additional outreaches for 2023 are in the works.

Visit SeekAndSave.AG.org for more information.

Ministers Letter

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WORSHIP SET.
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That's you, middle school gym. We love you, but you aren't our house. With shared spaces come shared policies, for better or worse. Sometimes, the church needs a place all its own.

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