



# EFCA Credentialing

## Frequently Asked Questions

For the official Conference-approved requirements for credentialing, please see Steps Toward Credentialing (“Steps”): <http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-steps-toward>

### I. Introduction

#### A. What is the meaning of credentialing in the EFCA?

The EFCA has a national credential affirmed by the Conference (the annual meeting of the EFCA held for the purpose of electing directors, as defined in the [EFCA Bylaws: http://www.efca.org/explore/what-we-believe.pdf](http://www.efca.org/explore/what-we-believe.pdf)). Those credentialed in the EFCA have been approved by a local EFC church, a district council and the national Board of Ministerial Standing in the areas of calling, character and biblical/theological competency (rooted in our Statement of Faith).

#### B. Why be credentialed in the EFCA?

There are five very good reasons to be credentialed in the EFCA: 1) Recognition of God’s Calling to and Gifting for Ministry; 2) Interdependency Between the Local Church, the District and the National Office – To Ensure Commitment to and Alignment of Beliefs (Statement of Faith) and Ethos; 3) Accountability to the Local church and to the Denomination, Both Doctrinally and Morally; 4) Development Educationally and Personally; and 5) Confirmed Legal Status by the IRS (through EFCA). To see a more thorough explanation of each of these points, please see the document “[Rationale for and Benefits of Credentialing in the EFCA](http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-rationale)”: <http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-rationale>

#### C. How does one go about being credentialed? What are the first steps?

It is required that one be in a qualifying ministry (vocational ministry in which one is compensated for at least 30 hours per week [cf. III. Qualifications, E for possible exceptions: “Can one serving in church planting or a bi-vocational setting be credentialed?”]), and fulfill the other expectations/requirements stated in “[Steps](#).” Once one is in a qualifying ministry, the first step is to contact the district office (<http://www.efca.org/resources/districts>) in the geographical region in which you are ministering to begin the process. The reason a qualifying ministry is required is to respect our congregational polity. Credentialing in the EFCA only begins after a local church calls an individual to serve in a vocational capacity. This respects the autonomy of the local church.

#### D. How can I enlist the support of my senior pastor and/or leadership board for this process and the commitment of my time and energy it will require?

If you value the process of credentialing, it will likely be valued and supported by the senior pastor and/or the leadership board. It would also be important to explain to them the rationale for and benefits of credentialing, both for you personally, and for the church. All will benefit greatly through this process. You might want to ask your senior pastor to serve as your mentor. You can be assured both of you would grow. For the guidelines for serving as a mentor, cf, “[Mentoring Through The Credentialing Process](http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-mentoring)”: <http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-mentoring>

**E. How can the leadership board encourage their pastoral staff to pursue credentialing and help them to own the importance of the process?**

Often the elder or leadership board follows the lead of the pastoral staff. If credentialing is not important to the pastoral staff, it will not be important to or be considered by the local church leaders. Though local churches are autonomous, as part of the EFCA they are also interdependent. This is an important way in which the EFCA comes alongside local church leadership and helps with alignment, doctrinal fidelity, moral purity and accountability of their pastoral staff. Just as members of local churches are accountable to local church leaders (and the congregation), so the pastoral staff is accountable to local church leaders (and the congregation) and the EFCA. In some local churches, leaders make any future increase in financial remuneration dependent on credentialing in the EFCA.

**F. What is the concept and scope of grace-gifts, ministry, vocational ministry and credentialing?**

Scripture clearly teaches that each believer has been given a grace-gift in order to serve our Lord and His Church (Eph.4:7). In addition, some believers have received the call of God upon their lives for vocational ministry and have been given grace-gifts for the task of preparing God's people to carry out the works of service which build up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11,12). It is those in vocational ministry which God Himself has chosen and appointed and which the local church affirms, and is subsequently recognized by the EFCA by the act of the laying on of hands (Acts 13:3, 1 Tim. 4:14, II Tim. 1:6) and the granting of an EFCA credential.

**II. Importance/Benefits**

**A. What are the benefits for the candidate of the credentialing process in the EFCA?**

The candidate will be affirmed beyond the local church regarding a calling to and gifting for ministry. Through this process, the candidate will have structure to guide the study and processing of biblical/theological truths and the pastoral applications of those truths in the lives of God's people. It will also provide accountability, both doctrinally and morally.

**B. What are the benefits to the local church?**

The local church leaders and membership will be assured that their pastoral staff is aligned with the EFCA, and is committed to serve within the EFCA. As members in a local church are under authority (of Christ and the leaders and members), so is the pastoral staff under the same authority, and also the EFCA. The pastoral staff is saying to the local church that we are all in the EFCA.

**C. Why should the local church encourage/require their vocational ministry staff to be credentialed in the EFCA?**

Because this is a national credential, it provides consistency and uniformity of standards and expectations for all those being credentialed. When a local church has a pastoral staff person who is credentialed in the EFCA, they can be reassured of the calling, character, and biblical/theological competency of this person. This is true of their pastoral staff who have been credentialed while in ministry with them, and it is also true of those they may call at some point in the future. This is an important way the national EFCA serves local churches. Moreover, this is a very important step to ensure doctrinal fidelity and moral purity in lives of those who serve as pastoral staff. If there is doctrinal compromise or moral failure with an uncredentialed pastoral staff person, the local church often has to address it alone. If a person is credentialed, it provides a national resource to the local church to address these matters intentionally, purposefully and redemptively. This is also an important way in which the autonomous local church communicates their interdependency with other local EFC churches together known as the EFCA. This would be the difference between being a pastor of an EFC church and being an EFC pastor. Finally, this is one small step towards the fulfillment of Jesus' high priestly prayer for believers to be one.

**D. How would this help the one who enters into the credentialing process as a means of ministerial and theological growth?**

It provides structure for one's study of biblical/theological truth with the EFCA Statement of Faith as the foundation. An avenue of further growth would be to teach this material to the local church as you are studying it, either in a sermon series, an adult Sunday school or in a small group. This has the dual benefit for both the person in the credentialing process and those in the local church to learn more about the EFCA and its gospel-centered, Christ-focused, God-glorifying biblical/theological commitments as expressed in the Statement of Faith. As is often the case, the teacher has the profound benefit of learning the most.

**E. What do the process of credentialing and the subsequent five-year reaffirmation of all credentialed individuals mean for the EFCA?**

It helps to ensure doctrinal fidelity. What one affirms doctrinally at some point in the past is important. But over time there are often changes in doctrinal positions or perspectives. Some of those changes are minor, simply shifts within acceptable biblical/theological parameters. Others are more substantive and compromise or undermine biblical truth through a move towards heterodoxy or heresy. The fact that all those credentialed in the EFCA are asked to affirm initially their commitment to the biblical/theological truths of the Statement of Faith and subsequently every five years to "subscribe to and affirm without mental reservation each article of the EFCA Statement of Faith" helps to ensure those credentialed in the EFCA remain committed to doctrinal truth both in the present and in the future.

**F. How does credentialing relate to the IRS?**

The IRS states that it is essential that one be licensed, commissioned or ordained. Since the EFCA has a national credential, the Conference expects that those in ministry in a local EFC Church will be credentialed following the Conference-approved national process. Ministry responsibilities include some, not all, of the following: performing qualified services, administration of the ordinances, be considered a religious leader by the church, lead worship, and oversee the ministry of the church.

**III. Qualifications**

**A. What are the requirements/qualifications to be credentialed in the EFCA?**

As stated in "[Steps](#)," there are seven requirements: 1) Must be a member in good standing of a local EFC church. 2) Must subscribe without mental reservation to the Statement of Faith of The Evangelical Free Church of America and agree to reaffirm that commitment every five years. 3) Must be engaged in a ministry that qualifies for a ministerial credential (vocational ministry in which one is compensated for at least 30 hours per week). 4) Must demonstrate a cooperative spirit with the purposes and policies of The Evangelical Free Church of America and a lifestyle consistent with biblical standards of Christian conduct. 5) Must be examined and approved by an ordination council or committee under the authority of the district. 6) Must complete a prescribed course of study, Free Church history, doctrine and polity as directed by the Board of Ministerial Standing. 7) Must conform to Evangelical Free Church policy concerning persons with a divorce in their background. The Evangelical Free Church of America does not normally issue ministerial credentials to a person who has a divorce in their background. Any person who has been divorced, or who is married to, or anticipates marrying a person who has been divorced, must be granted a [Divorce Policy Exception](http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-divorce-policy-exceptions). (<http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-divorce-policy-exceptions>)

**B. Are any specific skills required?**

In essence, what is required is that one has a clear call of God that is both individually discerned and corporately affirmed by the local church; one's character is above reproach, i.e. not that one is perfect or different from all the others but exemplary; and one has biblical, theological and pastoral competency.

**C. What theological training is required in order to be credentialed? Is formal seminary training required? Is there a place for non-formal training?**

What is required is that one demonstrates an acceptable level of biblical/theological training for ministry, whether formal and/or non-formal. The process is important, but we recognize and acknowledge there are numerous valid ways of being trained and equipped. For many, this may be formal theological training at seminary. For others, it may be non-formal theological training using other means. What matters is the biblical/theological requirements at the Certificate level, which will be uniform and not compromised for anyone, while the process of obtaining that level is secondary and varied.

**D. What is GATEWAY? How does it fit in the larger process of credentialing?**

EFCA GATEWAY Theological Institute exists to provide a pathway to ministry within the larger EFCA movement. GATEWAY offers language-specific, practical and accessible theological training for pastors, equipping them for effective ministry in their current contexts. GATEWAY is designed for leaders who have a need for theological and pastoral training but lack the time and resources to access traditional seminary education. GATEWAY intentionally and purposefully prepares students for being credentialed in the EFCA.

**E. Can one serving in church planting or a bi-vocational setting be credentialed?**

Though "[Steps](#)" states that one "Must be engaged in a ministry that qualifies for a ministerial credential (vocational ministry in which one is compensated for at least 30 hours per week)," there are exceptions. Either of these two ministries will likely fit under the exceptions. Questions about whether or not it does should be directed either to the District or national staff. Because of the importance of credentialing to the local church ministry and the EFCA, all those serving in these ministries ought to be encouraged to be credentialed.

**F. Who can be credentialed? Can a woman be credentialed?**

Any who are in a qualifying ministry and fulfill the requirements as stated in "[Steps](#)" can be credentialed. This means women serving in local church staff positions can receive the Certificate of Christian Ministry. (The Certificate of Ordination is reserved for men who are qualified, as the EFCA Conference determined our national credentialing process would be complementarian.) Because of the importance of credentialing to the local church ministry and the EFCA, all women serving in qualifying ministries ought to be encouraged to be credentialed.

**G. Can a youth pastor be ordained?**

Yes. As long as the youth pastor is serving in a qualifying ministry and meets the other requirements for an EFCA credential as outlined in "[Steps](#)," this person can receive the Certificate of Ordination. (Since the Certificate of Ordination is reserved for men, women serving in the role of youth pastor could receive the Certificate of Christian Ministry.) Because of the importance of credentialing to the local church ministry and the EFCA, all those serving in youth ministries ought to be encouraged to be credentialed.

**H. Is it possible to have an EFCA credential while serving in a non-EFCA ministry? What are the additional requirements?**

Though this is not done often, there are exceptions in which this is possible. If it is approved by the Board of Ministerial Standing, there are four requirements: 1) membership in a local EFC church; 2) accountability to the District Superintendent (or his delegated district staff) in the geographical region in which one ministers; 3) annual written report to the Director of Biblical Theology and Credentialing (representing the Office of the President); and 4) attendance at a district or national conference every other year.

**I. In addition to not fully aligning with the EFCA Statement of Faith, and the requirements for credentialing (III A), are there policies that would preclude or disqualify one from being credentialed in the EFCA?**

There are four policies that would disqualify one from being credentialed in the EFCA: Divorce - Though the EFCA does not normally grant credentials to one who has been divorced or who marries one who has been divorced, there are exceptions. Any candidate in this situation must be granted a [Divorce Policy Exception](http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-divorce-policy-exceptions) (DPE) before pursuing credentialing:

<http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-divorce-policy-exceptions>

[Homosexual Belief and Conduct](http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-homosexual-belief-and-conduct) - The EFCA will not credential one who engages in homosexual conduct or one who does not believe that homosexual behavior is sinful:

<http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-homosexual-belief-and-conduct>

[Sexual Abuse of a Minor](http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-sexual-abuse-minor) – Any person convicted or credibly accused of sexual misconduct with a minor will not be credentialed in the EFCA: <http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-sexual-abuse-minor>

Open Theism – if one denies God knows the future exhaustively, including future free acts of human beings, that person will not be credentialed in the EFCA.

**IV. Process**

**A. What is the process and of what does it consist?**

The EFCA credentialing process can be pictured as a three-legged stool, and each leg of that stool is committed to three key things: calling, character, and biblical, theological and pastoral competency. The three legs are the local church, the district (District Board of Ministerial Standing [DBOMS]) and the national (Board of Ministerial Standing [BOMS]), and each leg is primarily responsible for different aspects of credentialing, yet all are necessary.

**B. Who makes up the “council” for credentialing?**

The council reflects two important legs of the stool: the local church and the district. For the License, the composition of the credentialing council will be determined by the District. For permanent Certificates, the council must consist of a minimum of five EFCA pastors (three must be EFCA ordained) and five laypersons (two must be from the candidate’s local church). At least five EFC churches must be represented by the members of the council, with no more than three voting council members from any single church, including the candidate’s church. In some instances, local districts may elect permanent credentialing councils as their chosen method of examination, but these councils shall also meet the above criteria.

**C. What role does each part – local church, district and national – play in the credentialing process?**

The local church will generally not know as much about the biblical/theological competency, but they are the closest ones to the call and character. This is why letters of commendation are so important. The District has a sense of all of these areas, though less so the calling and character but more to the biblical/theological competency. This is why the District needs to know the national standards, as it bridges the gap between the local church and the national BOMS. BOMS, then, primarily focuses on biblical/theological competency, depending on the other two legs to have done their homework so that BOMS can be assured if the other entities give a positive commendation or approval, it can be accepted. (The ultimate authority is the EFCA Conference, with BOMS serving as the final authority on their behalf. The Conference has given BOMS the responsibility of carrying out the policies, which is reflected in this structure.)

**D. On what basis does the Board of Ministerial Standing (BOMS) evaluate an individual for credentialing?**

BOMS evaluates a person’s calling, character, and biblical, theological and pastoral competency. This evaluation is based on the vital input from the local church and the district. Regarding the biblical/theological aspect of the evaluation, the expectation for the License is theological

competency and alignment with the EFCA; for the Certificate of Christian Ministry it is theological proficiency; and for the Certificate of Ordination it is theological mastery.

**E. What are the strengths of our credentialing process?**

It affirms local church autonomy in that one must be called and affirmed by a local church to serve in vocational ministry before one can begin the credentialing process. Once that has occurred, then the EFCA recognizes and affirms that local church call and will come alongside that local church to give oversight to the EFCA national credential. This is reflective of our interdependency. Through the Board of Ministerial Standing giving oversight to and administering the EFCA national credential, there is consistency, uniformity and longevity to the process. There are various means, both formal and non-formal, of reaching the biblical/theological level required for each of the credentials, and a formal degree is not mandated. Once one is credentialed, there is also accountability, both doctrinally and morally, in that every five years one must reaffirm their belief in and commitment to the EFCA Statement of Faith. Once one has been credentialed in the EFCA, you will remain credentialed when you move to another qualifying ministry within the EFCA.

**F. What is the importance of this interdependency as it relates to doctrinal fidelity, theological competency and moral integrity?**

With the three entities engaged in the EFCA credentialing process -- the local church, the district and the national office -- there is strength. This interdependency (with each entity providing important and significant input that is unique to the role that each one plays) proves to be more than just adding up the three different entities. Instead, this interdependency provides a multiplied effect in the EFCA. It is one of the most obvious ways to validate that we are truly better together. This also provides assurance that together our vocational ministers will remain tethered to the text and grounded in the gospel which will influence and affect each of the local churches, which will, in turn, have a bearing on the whole EFCA.

**G. Do the paper and council have to be in English?**

It is not necessary for papers or councils to be in English. However, before writing a paper in a language other than English, make sure arrangements have been made and permission granted through the district.

**V. Credentials**

**A. I hear the terms Credential, License, Certificate, etc. What do they mean?**

The "credentialing process" refers to the whole process by which one is recognized as credentialed in the EFCA. "Credential" refers to any one of the credentials offered/provided by the EFCA. The License is temporary, for three years, and leads to a permanent Certificate, either a Certificate of Christian Ministry or a Certificate of Ordination. For those who have been ordained by another denomination or a local church, there is also a Transfer of Ordination option.

**B. What are the types of credentials? What is the difference between a license and a certificate? What are the differences between the Certificate of Christian Ministry and the Certificate of Ordination?**

The License is where a person begins. The primary purpose of the license is to identify theological competency and alignment. It consists of writing a 15-20 page paper, responding to approximately 55 questions, with a 90 minute defense before a council. For the [paper requirements](http://www.efca.org/resources/form/credentialing-license-paper-requirements): <http://www.efca.org/resources/form/credentialing-license-paper-requirements> The Certificate of Christian Ministry (CCM) focuses on theological proficiency. It consists of writing a 25-30 page paper, responding to approximately 90 questions, with a 2-3 hour defense before a council. For the [paper requirements](http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-certificate-christian-ministry-paper-requirements): <http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-certificate-christian-ministry-paper-requirements> The Certificate of Ordination (COO) focuses on theological mastery. It consists of writing a 35-40 page paper, responding to approximately 130 questions, with a 3-4 hour defense before a council. For the [paper requirements](http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-certificate-ordination-paper-requirements):

<http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-certificate-ordination-paper-requirements>

For those who have been ordained by another denomination or a local church, there is a Transfer of Ordination. For the [paper and council requirements](#):

<http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-transfer-ordination-paper-and-council-requirements>

**C. How is ordination defined/understood in the EFCA?**

In 1990 the EFCA Conference defined ordination in the EFCA in the following way: “Ordination in The Evangelical Free Church of America is the act of publicly setting a person apart for Christian ministry by prayer and the laying on of hands by others in ministry and the leadership of the local church; thus recognizing God’s call upon his life; his gifts and training for ministry; his commitment to teach and preach the sacred Scriptures.”

**D. How does ordination fit with role and context?**

The Certificate of Ordination is for men whose primary responsibility is that of preaching and teaching the Word in the context of the local church. This does not mean just a preaching pastor, but it could be a youth pastor, an associate pastor, etc. – any pastor whose primary ministry is that of preaching and teaching the Word. This means it might not fit an administrative pastor or a pastor of counseling, as their primary ministries are not likely preaching and teaching the Word. Additionally, it is not intended for those serving in parachurch ministries because that is not in the context of a local church. Our goal is to emphasize two things about ordination beyond the theological level of mastery, arrived at through formal or nonformal means: 1) a ministry of the Word 2) in the context of the local church. However, we also grant a certificate for specialized ministries such as theological education and missions.

**E. If one already has been ordained by another denomination or a local church, why is it important to transfer that ordination into the EFCA?**

Transferring one’s ordination to the EFCA reflects an alignment with and a commitment to the EFCA theology and ethos. It also puts one under the authority of and makes one accountable to the EFCA, the association (denomination) in which one is presently serving. Most local churches and many denominations do not have an ongoing requirement to reaffirm the Statement of Faith under which they were ordained. The EFCA does, which helps to ensure doctrinal fidelity both now and into the future. It also says that this person is “all in.”

**F. What is the process for a transfer of ordination into the EFCA?**

The candidate will submit to the district office a copy of the qualifications, expectations and procedures that were followed for his present ordination, along with his ordination paper and council minutes. Once the District (or District Board of Ministerial Standing [DBOMS]) receives the candidate’s paper, they will determine what issues need to be addressed in writing (this will be based on a comparison with the EFCA requirements under the “Doctrinal Section” and the “Pastoral and Personal Section”). If an issue has been addressed but requires clarification, it may be addressed in one-half to one page. If an issue has not been addressed at all, it may require one to two pages. Once this work has been completed, a DBOMS council will meet with the candidate for an oral defense of the paper. [For the complete process: http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-transfer-ordination-paper-and-council-requirements](http://www.efca.org/resources/document/credentialing-transfer-ordination-paper-and-council-requirements)