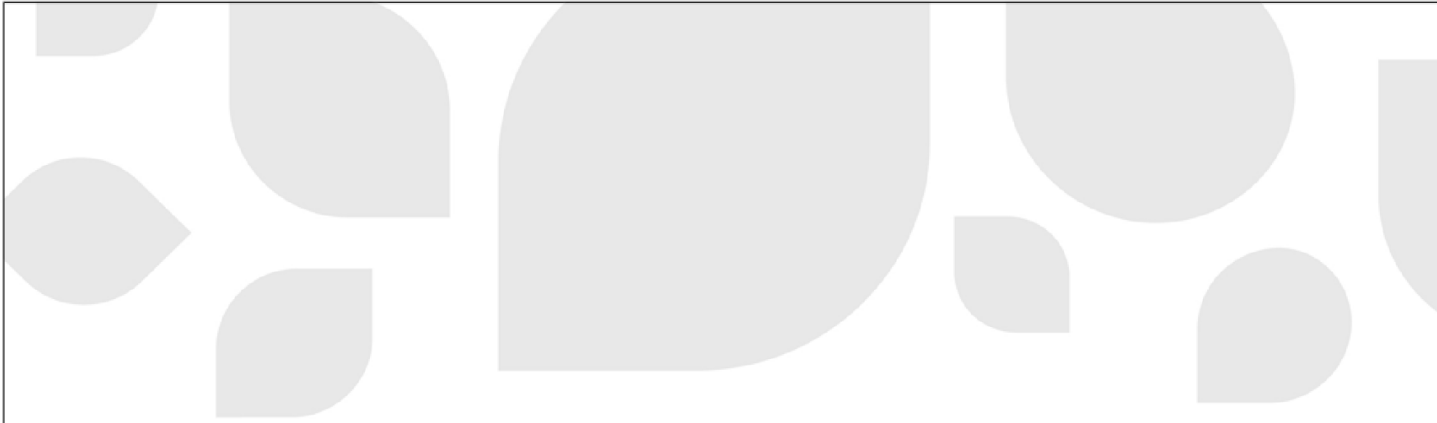




CREDENTIALS MANUAL

of the

CHURCH OF GOD



CHURCH
OF GOD
MINISTRIES

JESUS IS THE SUBJECT

CREDENTIALS MANUAL

of the

CHURCH OF GOD

2025 Revised Edition

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This 2025 edition of the *Credentials Manual* of the Church of God replaces all previous manual editions and is considered the official point of reference for all questions related to the licensing, ordination, registering, and accountability of ministers and congregations of the Church of God. For questions about this Manual, or for securing needed materials related to its implementation, contact Church of God Ministries.

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HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Church of God began in 1880 by reacting dramatically to an excessive institutionalization of church life, often characterized as the heavy laying of human hands-on God's holy body of believers. However, after about thirty years of existence, this "reformation movement" (as it often has been known) had begun to feel the pain of insisting on virtually no human organization being allowed in its own life. It had begun to permit small appearances of organization, but only as the need appeared to make necessary. The Spirit of God was to remain in control of constituting, energizing, and directing the life of the church.

By the 1930s, Anderson College, the Movement's first institution of higher education, had developed the practice of graduating ministerial students and then having a separate ceremony to also ordain select ones to ministry in the Church of God. The authority to oversee ministerial preparation and credentialing was yet not clearly determined. After 1938, such functions slowly moved to the state level as regional assemblies developed—again, only as the need appeared to make necessary. Inevitably, standards and procedures for ministerial preparation, ordination, and accountability were not formalized or uniform.

The General Ministerial Assembly of the Movement, which has functioned since 1917 as the church's central voice, made clear in 1948 that the problems associated with such informality and disparity of standards and procedures had become unacceptable. This needed to be recognized and addressed. Accordingly, the 1948 General Ministerial Assembly authorized the creation of a ministerial credentials manual, an initial attempt at a regularization of standards and procedures of ministerial life in the movement. While the need had become clear, progress in addressing it would be slow indeed.

The first Congress on Credentials of the Church of God met in 1986, nearly four decades later, resulting in the 1986 edition of a *Credentials Manual* for ministers and congregations. Additional Congresses followed in 1996, 2003, 2006, and 2010, resulting in new *Manual* editions, with Barry L. Callen acting as Editor of each edition. Why thcontinued to grow, mature, change, and find its identity and leadership in a rapidly evolving culture, facing newly evolving culture with fresh challenges, professional expectations, and legal requirements. Thus, the perceived need kept driving the ongoing development of the *Credentials Manual*.

Responsibility has required of the church fresh visioning, cautious but increased structuring, and now a longer and more carefully crafted set of ministerial and congregational standards and procedures. The prevailing paradox of the history of the Church of God remains what the 2011 *Manual* edition reports of itself. It "attempts to reflect the proper balance between legitimate autonomy and needed authority in the church's life." This balancing continues to be an important, delicate, and necessary matter for a properly prepared, formally recognized, and appropriately functioning ministry.

The 2015 General Assembly of the Church of God was another milestone in this ongoing process of needed and enlightened structuring of ministerial preparation, credentialing, and

conduct. That Assembly empowered a “Select Committee on Credentials,” with twenty-four members from the United States and Canada, to establish the most desirable contents of a revised 2017 edition of the *Credentials Manual*. One key component of this Committee’s crucial work was to consult with a new Credentials Congress, seeking broad perspective and ownership of the eventual results of its work. Two sessions of this Congress were convened, one in 2016 and the other in 2017.

All content of this edition of the *Credentials Manual* is authorized by the General Assembly of the Church of God, enacted through its standing Committee on Credentials, with implementation and future revision of the Manual to be determined by that Committee. This 2025 edition of the *Credentials Manual* was released by authorization of the Committee on Credentials of the General Assembly.

AUTHORIZATION AND LEGAL INTENT OF THIS 2025 Edition of the *CREDENTIALS MANUAL*

The intent of this 2025 edition of the *Credentials Manual* is to provide the definitive standards and processes for the Church of God in the United States. This intent is consciously limited to the standards and procedures of ministerial credentialing and congregational recognition. Beyond that, this Manual has no intended bearing on the legal relationships between a state/regional assembly of the Church of God and the church's General Assembly or its Ministries Council. When references are made to the Internal Revenue Service or 501(c)(3) tax status, the context is the legal and tax systems of the United States.

All users of this Manual should be aware of the following disclosure statements of legal intent and limitation. This *Credentials Manual* provides the needed accountability to the General Assembly of the Church of God and to federal and state laws in the United States. It thereby gives to credentialed ministers and recognized congregations the benefits provided under these laws.

LEGAL DISCLOSURE: This *Credentials Manual* provides general information related to potential legal issues and does not provide legal advice. No attorney-client or confidential relationship exists or will be formed. The information presented is intended to provide general information and not legal advice. It is not intended to be acted on as such and is subject to change without notice. An attorney or tax professional should be contacted for specific legal or tax advice.

To ensure compliance with requirements imposed by the Internal Revenue Service, we inform you that any tax advice contained in this communication, or in this *Credentials Manual* (or attachments therein), is not intended or written to be used by any taxpayer for the purpose of (1) avoiding penalties under the Internal Revenue Code or (2) promoting, marketing or recommending to another party any transaction matter addressed herein.

This *Credentials Manual* intends to put Biblical foundations into definitional and operational terms for the current recognition and practice of Christian ministry in the Church of God. It attempts to reflect the proper balance between legitimate autonomy and needed authority in the church's life. As directed by the General Assembly of the Church of God, the standards and processes presented herein are intended to be consistent, equitable, unifying, and biblically grounded.

The calling and gifting by the Holy Spirit for Christian ministry is given priority attention in these pages. It is recognized that there are structural dimensions crucial to identifying, supporting, and disciplining divine calls and gifts. Ignoring accountability in Christian ministry leads to unclear expectations, competing interests, poor communication, and lack of

cooperation— all barriers to fulfilling the Christian responsibilities for unity and effectiveness as good stewards of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A common approach to addressing issues related to ministerial and congregational credentialing, registering, and functioning opens the door of disciplined dialogue that protects integrity and enhances unity and ministry effectiveness. Christ calls, equips, unites, and sends disciples. This *Credentials Manual* is intended to be a tool to help unite the body of believers known as the Church of God. It puts into definitional and operational form the following mission central to this church body's life and leadership (drawn from the *Constitution* of the General Assembly):

The purpose of the Assembly shall be to further the ends of the Church of God: unity and holiness. As a people embracing Jesus as Lord, the Church of God strives to follow Him as He defined His ministry in Luke 4:16-21, anointed by the Spirit to: proclaim, heal, free, and restore, while conscious of the risks and costs of so doing.

ORGANIZATION. Materials in this Credentials Manual are organized with the user in mind. A continuous numbering system presents policies and procedures in a logical order, clearly identifying all sections and subsections. There also is a Glossary that lists and defines many terms or phrases key to this Manual.

REVISION. The 2017 General Assembly of the Church of God established and authorized a "Committee on Credentials" to interpret, implement, review, and revise this Credentials Manual as may become necessary and appropriate in the future. For the roles of this Committee, see "Glossary of Terms and Phrases" and Sections 1.1.4 and 7.7.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND PHRASES

The following definitions clarify the intended meaning in this *Credentials Manual* of key organizations, standards, and processes related closely to the recognition, certification, registration, and credentialing of congregations and ministers in the Church of God.

ENTITIES WITH SPECIALIZED ROLES

1. **Church of God.** The body of believers professing discipleship to Jesus Christ, members of the Body of Christ, conforming to faith and practice as understood by the light of biblical revelation, in fellowship with one another under the umbrella of the General Assembly of the Church of God in the United States and Canada.
2. **General Assembly.** The General Assembly of the Church of God conducts the general business of the Church of God in the United States and Canada and serves as a forum for the identification, selection, and empowerment of leaders for the Assembly and the ministries and agencies within the Assembly's portfolio. It authorizes particular state/regional/provincial Assemblies to issue ministerial credentials in accordance with the General Assembly's approved *Credentials Manual*.
3. **Church of God Ministries, Inc.** Church of God Ministries Inc. is the legally incorporated, non-profit corporation that holds title to all General Assembly tangible assets. When the Assembly is not in session, Church of God Ministries acts on its behalf in the pursuit of the Assembly's ends, including the issuing of a *Credentials Manual* and the authorizing of particular state/regional/provincial Assemblies to administer its policies and procedures.
4. **Ministries Council.** The Ministries Council serves as the Board of Directors of Church of God Ministries, appointed by and accountable to the General Assembly. The Council acts on behalf of the General Assembly when it is not in session.
5. **Committee on Credentials of the General Assembly (COC).** The 2017 General Assembly of the Church of God established a standing Committee on Credentials and authorized it to act on behalf of the General Assembly in implementing, interpreting, reviewing, and, when necessary, revising the General Assembly's *Credentials Manual*. The COC is accountable directly to the General Assembly. See sections 1.1.4 and 7.7 of this Manual.
6. **Assembly: State/Regional/Provincial.** Assemblies are state/regional/provincial organizations of the Church of God.
7. **Credentials Committees.** In order to implement the credentialing and certification of ministers and congregations within the boundaries of an authorized Assembly, and to hold them accountable to the standards, policies, and procedures of this *Credentials Manual*, all Assemblies authorized by the General Assembly will establish and have

properly trained one or more Credentials Committees. The roles of these Committees are defined in detail in this *Credentials Manual*.

8. **Leadership Focus.** *Leadership Focus* supports the work of Credentials Committees by serving as the primary source of preparation for all Church of God ministerial candidates in the United States. It is a ministry development tool wholly owned by Church of God Ministries and designed to equip and strengthen leaders through relational training with a missional perspective. While not a credentialing agent, it serves the Credentials Committees of the authorized Assemblies of the Church of God by providing ministerial and missional candidates with a comprehensive program of ordination preparation.
9. **Yearbook of the Church of God.** The *Yearbook* of the Church of God is a volume published periodically and maintained as a real-time record by Church of God Ministries. It presents extensive information about the Church of God worldwide. It carries a comprehensive listing of the ministers and congregations approved by an Assembly authorized by the General Assembly to grant ministerial credentials in the United States.

TERMS WITH SPECIALIZED MEANINGS

10. **Attributes of a Church of God Congregation.** A congregation of the Church of God should be characterized by particular attributes. These are listed in section 6.1.1.
11. **Code of Ethics.** High expectations are held for the personal and professional lives of credentialed ministers. These expectations are detailed in section 2.1.2 B.
12. **Denominational Intent.** This Credentials Manual does not intend to relate to the whole body of Christ in any exclusive or divisive (denominational) manner. Even so, occasionally it refers to “beliefs, standards, or practices widely embraced and generally taught in the Church of God.” The intent is to ensure that ministers and congregations affiliated with and credentialed by this particular church body are “aware, appreciative, and supportive of its distinctive heritage and commitments.”
13. **Educational Expectations.** Ministerial candidates are expected to pursue significant educational preparation for their vocations. However, life circumstances sometimes make it possible for only certain patterns and degrees of academic achievement. See section 2.1.5.
14. **Recognized Assembly.** To be a recognized Assembly in the Church of God, there are expectations, along with goals and measurements for defining a healthy and effective Assembly. See page 12.
15. **Redemptive Refuge.** Each Credentials Committee is encouraged to create a designated person or team, either as a formal part of the committee or in informal

cooperation with it, that exists as a safe place for ministers to come and receive spiritual support and accountability related to struggles with ongoing personal issues, temptations, and/or sins. See section 7.3.1.

- 16. Sexual Identity and Misconduct.** Section 7.4.1 details ministerial actions that require discipline. These include a detailed definition of sexual misconduct and a precise definition of sexual identity.
- 17. Specialized Ministers.** Some ministers are engaged in specialized ministries that make it impossible for them to be a part of the active life of any Assembly of the Church of God. These ministers are identified in section 4.4.1.
- 18. Specialized Ministry Groups.** A person or specialized ministry group wishing to be listed in the *Yearbook* in the Directory of Organizations must be approved annually by the credentialing body with jurisdiction where the home office of the ministry is located. See section 4.4.2.
- 19. Specialized Ministry Circumstances.** There are rare situations when an Assembly confronts a challenge that goes beyond its resources of personnel, time, language, and/or expertise. Handling such a circumstance is described in section 1.1.4.
- 20. Theological Beliefs.** Scripture prescribes the minister's theological qualifications, portraying the minister as one who is "able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confront those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9). In section 2.1.3, there is a listing of seven theological commitments and Church of God distinctives where ministerial candidates are expected to articulate alignment with the Church of God Teaching Tradition.
- 21. Vocational Minister.** Every Christian has a ministry. Ministerial credentialing, however, relates to vocational calls and carries with it both special recognition and accountability. Licensing and ordination are special recognitions for vocational ministers and requires a high level of readiness and a consuming passion to make ministry one's life vocation. See section 2.1.6 and 2.2.1-2.2.4.

EXPECTATIONS OF A RECOGNIZED ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly of the Church of God recognizes state and regional organizations (assemblies) in the United States to be its agents for credentialing ministers and recognizing congregations. The process of organizational recognition centers in that organization's inclusion in each new edition of the Yearbook of the Church of God.

Recognized organizations implement the standards and procedures established by the General Assembly and found in its authorized *Credentials Manual*. They seek to be characterized by the General Assembly expectations that follow. The intent of these expectations is to provide a means of setting forth goals and measurements by which a recognized organization can self-evaluate as it strives to serve its constituents and foster an environment of health and growth for the expansion of the Kingdom of God.

1. Model the spirit of Christ, which embraces truth in love; strives for unity and commitment to all constituents and congregations of the assembly; stimulates fellowship among its constituents and with other Christian organizations that are like-minded and mission-focused.
2. Commit to fulfilling the Great Commission through the ministries of their assembly.
3. Function in harmony with the doctrines and teaching of the Word of God as commonly understood by the Church of God Teaching Tradition.
4. Faithfully implement the General Assembly's *Credentials Manual*.
5. Work to enhance the unity and effectiveness of the mission of the Church of God movement at large.
6. Be committed and intentional about developing strategies and vision that foster an environment of multiplication of congregations and leaders.
7. Remain faithful to the teachings of Scripture regarding biblical marriage, family, holiness, and salvation through Christ alone.
8. Be committed to embracing and fostering a spirit of unity and equality in accord with the definitions and standards that appear elsewhere in this *Credentials Manual* and in related resolutions of the General Assembly of the Church of God.
9. Encourage opportunities for each congregation within the Assembly to be a growing and healthy congregation that is lovingly and effectively reclaiming its community for Jesus Christ.
10. Promote opportunities and a healthy environment of support, fellowship, and accountability for each minister and emerging leader to grow in spiritual knowledge, skills, competencies, and abilities in their professional and personal lives so that ministry is enhanced and leaders are developed and intentionally multiplied.

11. Engage, develop, and honor within the Assembly strong and gifted leadership that reflects the intentional diversity of that Assembly and region.
12. Ensure that the assembly and each congregation maintain responsible practices of organizational integrity, including adherence to current bylaws and budgets. Congregations are encouraged to consider conditional deeding to safeguard Kingdom assets in accordance with General Assembly guidelines.
13. Ensure that the work of the Credentials Committee of the Assembly functions in accord with the Credentials Manual of the Church of God and the recognized practices and procedures of the Church of God as directed by the General Assembly, and that the credentialing processes for every congregation and minister are undertaken with respect, equitably, and in a timely fashion.

In cases where an engaged body authorized by the General Assembly has not successfully achieved the above, the Committee on Credentials of the General Assembly will initiate a process designed to reach these attributes and resolve conflicts that have arisen as a result of their lack. Such attempts will be guided by the material found in section 7 of this *Credentials Manual*.

THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF CREDENTIALS COMMITTEES

At the center of most of the processes of ministerial preparation, credentialing, and accountability described in this *Credentials Manual* is the work of the Credentials Committee established by an authorized Assembly. Its various roles are so important, and often so sensitive in nature, that committee members must be chosen with care, properly trained, and function at the highest level of responsibility to the church and its leaders. Sections 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 provide detail and should be read with particular care and followed closely. The effective implementation of this *Credentials Manual* depends in general on appropriately gifted and properly motivated and trained Credentials Committee members.

In order to support this vital work and ensure the operational implementation of all elements required in the ministerial credentialing process, individuals selected to serve on Credentials Committees will fulfill standard training requirements set forth by the Committee on Credentials in cooperation with Church of God Ministries and *Leadership Focus*. Additional training by the Committee on Credentials may be required and provided each year for the Chair of each Credentials Committee to ensure that resourcing, support, legal information, and other updates are provided.

SECTION 1

THE CREDENTIALING OF VOCATIONAL MINISTERS

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- 1.1.2 Membership, Accountability, Roles
- 1.1.3 Training of Committee Members
- 1.1.4 Approach to Exceptional Circumstances

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- 1.4.1 Categories of Vocational Ministers
- 1.4.2 When Special Circumstances Require Altered Procedures

SECTION 1

THE CREDENTIALING OF VOCATIONAL MINISTERS

1.1 The Credentials Committees

1.1.1 Purpose and Jurisdiction of a Credentials Committee

The purposes of a Credentials Committee (potentially called by differing names) include functioning on behalf of assemblies in licensing and ordaining vocational ministers in the Church of God movement, and in recognizing certain non-vocational servants of the church. The committee periodically approves commissioned, licensed, and ordained ministers and congregations of the Church of God.

Committee functions may include, but are not necessarily limited to, providing leadership in pastor-congregation conflict resolution, revoking and/or restoring a vocational minister's credentials, supervising the transferring of credentials for ministers from other communions or countries, assisting congregations in securing pastoral leadership, assisting ministers in securing pastoral assignments, facilitating the recognition of congregations and free-standing (para-church) ministry organizations of the Church of God, counseling and disciplining congregations, and expediting the administrative reporting of its actions to its parent assembly and Church of God Ministries.

1.1.2 Membership, Accountability, and Roles of a Credentials Committee

- A. The Credentials Committee is established by the governing body of the appropriate assembly and has authority, as set forth in the assembly's bylaws, to make committee decisions and take appropriate actions.
- B. The governing body that establishes the Credentials Committee in each state, district, or province has the responsibility of oversight, accountability, and training of the Credentials Committee's membership. Training Resources are provided through the Committee on Credentials, Church of God Ministries, and *Leadership Focus*.
- C. Committee members are expected to participate in and support the life of the Church of God and exhibit a high degree of spiritual maturity, gifts of discernment, leadership, redemptive intent, and sufficient ministerial experience to render wise decisions in relation to their ministerial peers. They also must be trained for this critical role through Church of God Ministries, the Committee on Credentials, and *Leadership Focus*.

- D. In order to gain the caliber of person desired, with the abilities identified above and certification provided by the assembly's training program, it is recommended that those who serve on Credentials Committees be ratified rather than elected.
- E. The membership of a Credentials Committee should have a diversity that reflects a fair representation of ministers from the congregations being served. This diversity should include race, color, ethnicity, gender, age, congregational size, and geographic location. By assembly bylaws, some Credentials Committees may have lay members. If not, a Credentials Committee should have the authority to call on lay representatives of its authorizing assembly for consultation and assistance in its work.
- F. Conflicts of interest must be avoided in the implementation of the work of a Credentials Committee. A conflict of interest exists when a Credentials Committee member, in the attempt to make a fair decision on an issue at hand, cannot be separated from a bias related to the decision to be made. Such biased circumstances include being a close friend, relative, advocate, or adversary of the person concerning whom a decision is to be made. When a conflict of interest exists, the involved committee member should voluntarily avoid participation in the decision. If the majority of the committee judges that one of its members has a conflict of interest and the member does not avoid participation voluntarily, it is the committee's responsibility to require that member to be absent while the issue is discussed and decided.
- G. Most issues discussed by Credentials Committees should be kept in the strictest of confidence. Much of the work of a Credentials Committee is sensitive in nature and may have legal implications; it is not, therefore, "for publication." Confidentiality is vital and must be respected in all committee procedures. Information in the files of a Credentials Committee should be considered confidential and kept secure.
- H. Committee members are responsible for sensitive documents. Sensitive documents should be secured and care should be taken to adhere to federal, state, and provincial laws concerning this issue. All documents are the sole property of the Credentials Committee and should be returned to the committee by a member upon leaving office. Copies of any and all files made for credentialing purposes should be disposed of according to federal, state, and provincial laws.

- I. Credentials Committees are to work with a particular spirit and attitude. They exist primarily to support, equip, energize, encourage, and restore. They should not be seen as focusing on the enforcement of restrictive rules and the executing of punishment. Their core functions are to journey with those in preparation, mediate when conflict arises, and restore whenever possible those who experience failure.

1.1.3 Training Members of a Credentials Committee

- A. *Leadership Focus* will provide training to each Assembly as it enters and utilizes the *Leadership Focus* program.
- B. *Leadership Focus* will provide several training modules overseen by a coach and an evaluation process that provides training in:
 1. This *Credentials Manual*. This may be a multi-module presentation.
 2. The nature and work of the Credentials Committee.
 3. Assessments and theological statements.
 4. The nature and importance of vocationally trained ministers in the leadership of a congregation.
 5. The three levels of credentialing and their appropriate use.
 6. Navigating the powerful dynamic of multicultural and multi-generational ministry.
 7. Best practices for the discipline and restoration of ministers.
 8. Best practices for the discipline and restoration of congregations.
 9. Best practices for the transfer of credentials from another faith group to the Church of God.
 10. Annually, credentials committee chairs participate in provided training that involves developing greater skills in leadership and receiving updates on legal and other information critical to their role.
- C. It is the responsibility of each state/region or district to be responsible for the following training, equipping, and policy decisions.
 1. That each new member fulfills the *Leadership Focus* training program.
 2. Clarification of expectations for credentialing members.
 3. The processes and actions for transferring credentials from another faith group.
 4. The relational role with each candidate and the credentials committee.

5. Ensure compliance with the standards and practices appearing in this *Credentials Manual*.
 6. Ensure compliance with state laws and codes.
- D. As members of Credentials Committees complete both their *Leadership Focus* and local training, they will receive certification confirming their readiness to serve in this capacity.

1.1.4 Specialized Ministry Circumstances

In rare situations when resources of personnel, time, language, and/or expertise are inadequate for the credentialing task at hand, an assembly should consider pursuing credentialing implementation partners. Such partners could include: (1) specialized bodies within the Church of God; (2) congregations of the Church of God possessing a strong administrative infrastructure to support ministerial credentialing; (3) neighboring Church of God assemblies with excess credentialing capacity; and/or (4) organizations with relevant language, cultural, technical, and/or legal expertise.

All such credentialing partnerships must maintain the same ministerial training requirements for ministerial candidates and for the Credentials Committees as these requirements are authorized by Church of God Ministries. They also must use *Leadership Focus* as the primary source for this training.

In a rare instance where an assembly faces an unresolved credentialing challenge involving a minister or congregation, a challenge that proves beyond the assembly's capacity or will to resolve satisfactorily, even with available partnerships, the Committee on Credentials (COC) of the General Assembly is authorized (1) to receive from any party involved a request for assistance and then (2) to initiate a process of resolution. Depending on the nature of the issue, the process may involve a team appointed by the COC, with its members from within and outside the assembly in question, who have skills related to the issue at hand. For the spirit of such involvement by the COC, see section 7.7.

1.2 The Theology and Purpose of Credentialing Vocational Ministers

Every Christian disciple has a ministry, and all who are called to ministry should be accountable. Ministerial credentialing, however, relates to vocational calls and carries with it both special recognition and accountability. Credentials are covenantal in nature; to accept such credentials is to become accountable to the established credentialing body of the appropriate area assembly. While most ministries reserved

for the laity of the church do not require formal recognition as a means of establishing accountability, ministries practiced by clergy persons usually do.

Credentialing in the Church of God takes the forms of commissioning, licensing, and ordination. Each requires that certain qualifications be met. It is the responsibility of the appropriate credentialing body to determine whether a minister is qualified for credentialing and, if so, when and at which level. Evidence of certain spiritual prerequisites is required by a Credentials Committee for a prospective ministerial candidate to initiate pursuit of appropriate credentials. This evidence includes:

1. Salvation—as shown in a holy lifestyle;
2. Evidence of the call of God—a divine appointment to Christian ministry;
3. A demonstrated need for vocational credentials;
4. Fellowship and involvement in a local congregation of the Church of God;
5. Demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the Bible.

Because there are varieties of ministry, there are varieties of credentialing. Those who are commissioned, licensed, or ordained receive such credentialing because they have been “set apart” for a ministry that requires a more extensive involvement and a special gifting by the Holy Spirit. Credentialing at whatever level signifies a covenant relationship between the minister and the credentialing body, the minister and ministerial peers, the minister and the church at large, the minister and the local church being served, and the minister and God. Assuring the integrity of each of these covenant relationships rests on patterns of mutual accountability.

1.3 Credentialing Vocational Ministers

In order to address the concerns and standards of some organizations and legal requirements, licensing will normally be the initial level of credentialing for a ministerial candidate. The ordination process involves a minimum of three years. A candidate’s license may be renewed annually until ordination requirements are fulfilled. Being licensed for repeated years and even completing the prescribed preparation process is not a guarantee of ordination.

1.3.1 Commissioning to a Local Congregation

The purpose of commissioning is to recognize and support one who articulates a sense of call to ministry. Credentialing bodies may commission a person to a local congregation for terms of one or two years at their discretion, depending on circumstances and qualifications. This commission is not transferrable to another congregation.

A commission is given on the condition of an annual review by the credentialing body. It may be voided by action of the credentialing body if deemed advisable. It may be renewed so long as the credentialing body judges the minister worthy of such continuing credentialing. Being commissioned does not necessarily imply that the candidate will eventually be licensed and/or ordained.

1.3.2 Licensing

Licensing is often the initial level of credentialing that acknowledges a minister's call to the Christian ministry and a corresponding commitment to vocational involvement. Licensing affords a limited measure of recognition and accountability. While it may serve as a step toward ordination, licensing should not be viewed as the promise of ordination. Licensing often satisfies both legal requirements and those imposed by institutions such as hospitals, nursing homes, and jails, which provide opportunities for pastoral care.

Credentialing bodies may license ministers for terms of one or two years, at their discretion, depending on circumstances and the qualifications of the minister. A license is given on the condition of an annual review by the credentialing body. It may be voided by action of the credentialing body if deemed advisable. It may be renewed if the credentialing body judges the minister worthy of such continuing credentialing.

1.3.3 Ordination

Ordination, the final step of vocational credentialing, recognizes a minister's call and vocational commitment to the Christian ministry. It provides for accountability to the appropriate credentialing body and satisfies certain legal requirements of the state or province. Ordination is usually needed by persons who serve as leaders of local congregations, in institutional ministries, missionary endeavors, and certain other formal capacities. Ordination is to be granted only when it is strategic to the performance of vocational ministry to which one is called, and when its recipient is found suitable for ordination by virtue of divine call, appropriate character, spirit, commitment, preparation, beliefs, and performance. See section 2.00 for a fuller description of these ministerial characteristics and qualifications.

1.4 Those Who May Be Credentialed by Commissioning, Licensing, and/or Ordination

1.4.1 Categories of Vocational Ministers

The following identifies the ministerial categories of those vocational ministers who may be credentialed through licensing and/or ordination.

Pastors

Persons who pastor recognized Church of God congregations may be properly considered for ordination, provided they have made a long-term vocational commitment to Christian ministry with the Church of God and otherwise meet the qualifications for ordination listed in section 2.00 of this *Credentials Manual*.

Staff Associates

Career staff associates (e.g., those engaged in music and worship ministry, youth ministry, Christian education ministry) who have made long-term vocational commitments to congregational Christian ministry and who have achieved professional competence may be appropriately considered for ordination. In such instances, steps toward ordination should be no different from those prescribed for pastors.

Organizational Staff

Professional persons who have made a long-term vocational commitment to Christian ministry and who serve as evangelists or in administrative, educational, para-church, or institutional capacities that support the work of a local congregation may be appropriately considered for ordination. In such instances, steps toward ordination should be no different from those prescribed for pastors.

Chaplains

Persons who represent the church at large as military or institutional chaplains often find that ordination is a prerequisite for employment and placement. Those who have made long-term vocational commitments to these or similar callings may be appropriately considered for ordination. In such instances, steps toward ordination should be no different from those prescribed for pastors.

Christian Counselors

Professional counselors who have made a long-term vocational commitment to Christian ministry and who have become properly educated for service as Christian counselors may be appropriately considered for ordination. In such instances, steps toward ordination should be no different from those prescribed for pastors.

Missionaries

Persons may be considered for ordination if they represent the church at large as formally appointed missionaries through Church of God Ministries and have a long-term vocational commitment to Christian ministry. In such instances, steps toward ordination should be no different from those prescribed for pastors.

Note #1: It is understood that credentialing assemblies may license any of the above persons. In some cases, only a commission may be given. It should not be assumed that issuance of a commission assures eventual ordination. Circumstances may make licensing more appropriate than ordination. Commissioning may be considered the best option when the minister deserves recognition, but does not meet all the requirements for ordination as listed in section 3 of this *Credentials Manual*.

Note #2: Although traditional undergraduate students preparing for ministry cannot be credentialed, it is important that, during their junior and senior years, they begin to connect with a local credentialing assembly and, if so desired, begin the credentialing process. This important relational and ministry connection will help when they enter ministry. It is important that, as this process begins, the ministerial student has the endorsement of the home church's pastor. When judged appropriate, the assembly involved will introduce the student to *Leadership Focus*.

Note #3: All specialized church servants who are not vocational ministers may be recognized formally by a local congregation as it judges appropriate. A congregation may wish to recognize a specialized church servant in its midst by "commissioning" that person for local service.

1.4.2 When Special Circumstances Require Altered Procedures

Special circumstances may sometimes require altered procedures to serve the best interests of given ministers and their livelihoods. This is particularly true with some chaplains, missionaries, and transfers.

Chaplains

In the event that time constraints preclude adherence to all the credentialing procedures outlined in section 3, Credentials Committees may waive the standard waiting period for chaplains, provided that the candidate otherwise qualifies for ordination and continues in *Leadership Focus* until its completion.

Missionaries

Persons called to full-time ministry on the mission field who desire ordination should seek such credentialing from the assembly representing their home church prior to mission placement. Following acceptance of a mission assignment from Global Strategy, the mission candidate will have credentials transferred from the home assembly to Global Strategy as he or she continues in *Leadership Focus* and preparation for the assignment. A mission candidate who has not formally begun the

credentialing process in the home assembly will be credentialed through Global Strategy, with credentials held by Global Strategy.

For career missionaries under appointment through Church of God Ministries, ministerial credentials issued through their home assemblies are transferred to Global Strategy for the duration of their time of missionary service.

Special “Assembly Recognized” License. In a rare set of circumstances, a credentials committee may decide it justifiable to seek to license a minister who lacks the ability to complete the standard *Leadership Focus* (LF) preparation program, even when needed format adjustments are made. Prior to such specialized licensing, the committee must appeal to LF for an alternate preparation program to support a specialized licensing that will not lead to ordination. Typically, it will include about ten LF essentials. Once this LF program is mutually agreed, and the candidate affirms the ability and intent of completing it, the committee may proceed to initiate the licensing process. Such a license is to be designated “Assembly Recognized” (AR), not be transferable beyond the issuing assembly, and first be granted only after one year of acceptable progress on the alternate LF program. License renewal is dependent on the candidate having successfully completed the alternate LF program. For additional license renewals, the committee must do a review of the minister and ministry at least every two years.

Transfers from Outside the Church of God

The Church of God welcomes any Christian minister requesting ordination in the Church of God and holding valid ministerial credentials granted by another church body. It wishes to create no unnecessary obstacle to such a request. Nonetheless, there are certain non-negotiables, and responsibility requires proper due diligence in order to be consistent, equitable, biblical, and in compliance with all expectations of this Credentials Manual. There are variables that require careful research and may result in differing requirements of ministers requesting credentials.

Credentials presented for transfer may come from Christian traditions that differ theologically with the Church of God, will require the candidate to complete the three-year track of *Leadership Focus*.

Because of the significant commonality of the general Christian tradition, ministers credentialed for five years by a member body of the *Wesleyan Holiness Connection*, or another denomination in the Wesleyan Holiness tradition, who are in good standing, often will be given favorable consideration in the preparation track required, as individual circumstances justify. A current listing of these Christian bodies may be found on holinessandunity.org.

Depending on the outcomes of an initial meeting, the Credentials Committee will determine which of the available preparation Tracks implemented by *Leadership Focus* is most appropriate. This determination will be made in cooperation with the Chair of the Committee on Credentials and the Executive Director of *Leadership Focus*. Only then, will the candidate begin *Leadership Focus*.

Typically, a minister of the Church of God may not hold credentials other than those provided by the Church of God. If a transferring minister satisfies all requirements for ordination in the Church of God, that minister will be asked to furnish the credentials committee with the previous ordination certificate so that it may be returned to the granting body. The minister will then be issued an ordination certificate by the Church of God.

Dual credentials may be held in rare cases, but only if there are exceptional circumstances and prior permission is granted by the Credentials Committee of the Church of God after consultation with the Committee on Credentials. For example, dual credentials could be held if a minister satisfies all the requirements for ordination in the Church of God, but surrendering a previous ordination would cause the loss of pension benefits. In such cases, documentation from the outside ordaining body must be provided.

Those with Undocumented Immigrant Status

Church of God ministers living in the United States who are undocumented immigrants may apply for credentials (licensing and ordination) as any other qualifying candidate. The undocumented status does not preclude a person from seeking and receiving such credentials. While an undocumented immigrant may be legally credentialed for ministry responsibilities, that person is not allowed to receive salary or benefits for such services. Note that current law in the United States may vary or be changed.

Transfers from Outside the United States and Canada

Persons transferring ministerial credentials from outside the United States will be received by the appropriate assembly and retain the credentials from the country of origin. The receiving assembly will review the minister's previous credentialing process and content and, if needed, give direction in areas of lack in order to maintain integrity with this current Credentials Manual.

SECTION 2

STANDARDS FOR CREDENTIALING VOCATIONAL MINISTERS

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SECTION 2

STANDARDS FOR CREDENTIALING VOCATIONAL CHRISTIAN MINISTERS

In order to provide for a biblically grounded, unifying, consistent, and equitable standard that is easily transferable across assemblies, *Leadership Focus* will be the primary source of training for all candidates. It is understood that, while it is the aspiration for all assemblies to have their candidates fully engaged in *Leadership Focus*, each Credentials Committee may establish additional expectations (within limits) of its candidates, individually or corporately, as it deems necessary for the sake of effective ministry.

2.1 Qualifications for Credentialing Vocational Christian Ministers

Credentialing vocational Christian ministers occurs at three levels, as explained in sections 1.3.1 -1.3.2. Such credentialing must always rest on the condition that certain personal and professional expectations have been met. Indiscriminate credentialing practices only bring reproach on the ministry and harm to the church. The credentialing body, therefore, must be aware of the essential qualifications that give evidence of a person's fitness for Christian ministry, and know how to determine that a candidate possesses these qualifications.

The crucial qualifications for vocational ministry are divided into six categories. None of these should be considered less essential than another. To be unqualified in even one area is to be unqualified for the ministry and, hence, for vocational credentialing.

2.1.1 The Motivational Qualification

CREDENTIALING IS FOR THOSE INWARDLY CONVINCED THAT GOD HAS SINGLED THEM OUT FOR VOCATIONAL CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

Success in vocational Christian ministry will depend largely on whether or not candidates enter it with the appropriate motivation and aims. The subject of motivation, then, is the first qualification to be addressed by a Credentials Committee.

Three motives may beckon one to Christian ministry: (1) a sense of divine call; (2) altruism, the desire to be helpful to others; and (3) egocentricity, the interest in self-advancement. The third is a potentially destructive and unjustifiable motive. The second is laudable, but often shallow. Only the first is adequate. Nothing short of a

sense of divine appointment sustains commitment to vocational ministry and the daily call to accountability. It is likely that altruism and even egocentricity enter the picture for most ministers, whether recognized or not; yet, such human motivations must never be dominant.

Consideration should be given to two additional reasons that cause some people to be motivated toward the Christian ministry: (1) unusual pressure from family members or significant associates; and (2) misguided sensitivity to obey God. These two false motives usually can be identified when examination reveals that the candidate's personal interests and aptitudes are incompatible with vocational Christian ministry. It is important to determine whether the candidate is attracted to the ministry by the honor of titles, anticipation of public acclaim, the prospect of wielding authority, the satisfaction of humanitarian "do-goodism," a messianic delusion, trying to please others, or a genuine sense of divine call.

Motivation will be measured by such scriptural mandates as Matthew 20:28, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Ephesians 4:12, and 1 Peter 5:3. Because proper motivation is such a key component of effective ministry, the Credentials Committee, directly or through the supervising mentor named to represent the committee, should confront every candidate for vocational credentialing with questions such as these:

1. Why do you want to be a minister? Describe your call to the Christian ministry.
2. As you understand it, what distinguishes a minister from the general "helping" professions? What is the difference between what you feel called to and what every believer is called to?
3. What do you think should be the attitude of laypersons toward vocational ministers?
4. On what basis would you say that a minister should be recognized as the leader?
5. When your ministry is completed, what would you like to have said about your years of service?
6. What spiritual gifts do you find in yourself that probably are divine enablement of your ministry?
7. What are your devotional practices? Are these adequate to sustain your spiritual health in the midst of the many demands of active vocational ministry?
8. How do you cultivate and express your relationship to the ministry of the Church of God locally, regionally/provincially, and nationally?
9. How do you cultivate and express your relationship to the larger body of Christ beyond the borders of the Church of God?

It is strongly recommended that the candidate for vocational credentialing be offered professional testing. The purpose is to better evaluate motivational and other qualifications for vocational Christian ministry.

2.1.2 The Moral and Ethical Qualifications

CREDENTIALING IS FOR THOSE WHOSE CHARACTER AND REPUTATION ARE WORTHY OF CHRISTIAN MINISTERS.

Credentialing for vocational ministry requires that the personal conduct, value system, and lifestyle of candidates be consistent with the standards and disciplines of the Bible as generally understood in the Church of God Teaching Tradition. It can never be guaranteed that all people will speak well of credentialing candidates; even so, there must be evidence of a clear pattern of life being lived in the model of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit.

1. Fitness Measured by Scripture

The following scriptural passages should be used as a partial basis for evaluation of a candidate's fitness for vocational credentialing:

1. The spiritual test (Titus 1:8, i.e., "holy");
2. The ethical test (Titus 1:7, i.e., "blameless");
3. The self-discipline test (Titus 1:7, "not...arrogant or quick tempered or a drunkard or violent"; Titus 1:8, "master of oneself," "self-controlled"; and 1 Timothy 3:2, "temperate");
4. The justice test (Isaiah 1:7, "Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, obtain justice for the orphan, plead the widow's case);
5. The equity test (1 Corinthians 12:4-5, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.);
6. The confidence test (Titus 2:7, "a model of good deeds");
7. The integrity test (Romans 12:9, "love genuine...hold to the good");
8. The experience test (1 Timothy 3:6, "not a recent convert");
9. The humility test (Romans 12:3, "not think of oneself more highly than one ought to think");

10. The graciousness test (1 Corinthians 13, “patient and kind...not irritable or resentful”);
11. The domestic test (1 Timothy 3:4, “must manage one’s own household well”);
12. The stewardship test (Malachi 3:10, “Bring the full tithe into the storehouse”; 1 Timothy 1:12, “I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service”).

Ultimately, the test of personal character is not one’s ability to give correct answers to questions pertaining to morals and ethics. It is the consistent and public demonstration of an authentic Christian life.

2. Code of Ethics

The ideal of the life of God within is that we continue in lifelong growth and development in Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Pet. 3:18). This life is lived out in visible and tangible ways. There is a content-filled, ethical lifestyle that the ordained minister should model and that congregations and colleagues in ministry should expect from vocational ministers. It is not to be assumed that a candidate is aware of the scope and detail of such ethical living. Thus, it is expected that each ministerial candidate become familiar with and abide carefully by the following minimum Code of Ethics.

Code of Ethics for Ministers in the Church of God

PREAMBLE

This Ministerial Code of Ethics establishes moral and ethical standards of behavior to be adhered to by all persons licensed or ordained in the Church of God. It is generally assumed that all ministers will behave ethically. However, reality indicates that such assumptions are occasionally incorrect. Therefore, although the following is not a legal document and cannot alone create an ethical person, we attempt here to establish our expectations for professional conduct for all persons who engage in ministry on behalf of the Church of God.

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

1. My life will be lived for the purpose of giving glory to God and reflecting the character and countenance of Jesus Christ in all that I say, think, and do.
2. I will act in ways that uphold and enhance the honor, integrity, equity, morality, and dignity of the gospel of Christ in general and the profession of a minister in particular.

3. I will maintain a life of personal and public integrity before God, the congregation I serve, and the wider Kingdom community both inside and outside the Church of God.
4. I will be known as a person of my word, always maintaining confidentiality where appropriate and being a person who speaks and lives by the truth in every context.
5. I will limit my freedoms rather than weaken ministry by refraining from all kinds of addictive, dependent, and self-destructive behaviors.
6. I will use my position to dispel gossip, resolve conflict in accordance with biblical teaching, and create a culture of trust and reconciliation.
7. I will enter the pastoral relationship to benefit those I serve, not myself. This means that I will faithfully teach the Word of God, protect the vulnerable, and offer pastoral care to all regardless of race, gender, creed, ethnic origin, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation.
8. I will maintain appropriate boundaries between myself and parishioners, refraining from any behavior that manipulates, demeans, shames, wounds, manipulates, coerces, or takes power over another person.
9. I will promote and support the ministry of my colleagues, rejoicing with them in their victories and weeping with them through their challenges.
10. I will give myself to serving the wider church as I am able and lead my congregation to be a valuable partner in the work of my Assembly of the Church of God as well as Kingdom work in my community.
11. I will always strive to grow in ministry through life-long learning and adequate preparation that will enhance my knowledge and skill levels in ministry.
12. I will honor the Church of God General Assembly's resolutions on same-sex marriage by refusing to perform or participate otherwise in the leadership of the marriage ceremonies of same-sex persons.

PERSONAL CONDUCT

1. I will demonstrate my personal love for God as revealed in Jesus Christ in my life and ministry.
2. I will commit myself to biblical standards as I pursue holy living in all my thoughts, words, and actions.
3. I will cultivate a consistent devotional life, practicing spiritual disciplines of study, prayer, spiritual direction, and meditation.
4. All my sexual expression--including thoughts, words, and actions--will be reserved exclusively for my spouse. If I am unmarried, my pursuit of a spouse will maintain biblical teaching regarding chastity and purity outside of marriage. That means that I will maintain high moral standards and not engage in sexual misconduct, whether in person, by reading material, telephone, computer, or any other means.
5. I will limit my freedoms rather than weaken ministry by refraining from all kinds of addictive, dependent, and self-destructive behavior.
6. I will honor my family in all ways, holding my marriage as a sacred and holy union and raising my children to know and love the Lord and His church.
7. I will maintain good financial stewardship, managing my money wisely and honestly, exercising restraint in spending, and demonstrating generosity toward the church and others.
8. I will maintain appropriate boundaries in all relationships, avoiding blurring the line between vocational and personal relationships. As a result, I will avoid exploiting others for my benefit.
9. I will give adequate attention to self-care, maintaining good health physically, emotionally, and spiritually. When necessary, I will seek help from others to see that this is done well.
10. I will actively seek and maintain high standards of accountability to my family, my colleagues in ministry, and relevant leadership both inside the congregation I serve and the Assembly of the Church of God in which I reside.
11. I will strive to live a balanced life that honors my commitments to my family and friends, providing for sufficient privacy and quality time together.
12. I will use social media responsibly, knowing that I am liable for any inappropriate use. This Code of Ethics is a guide for identifying the range of subjects that might be judged "inappropriate." As a leader, I also encourage my staff and congregation to do the same.

3. Background Check

An essential aspect of confidence concerning the advisability of approving the credentialing of a candidate (or maintaining the credentials of an already licensed or ordained minister) shall include, but not be limited to, the Credentials Committee having investigated with due diligence the candidate's: (1) history of criminal convictions, if any; (2) history of alcohol or other substance abuse, if any; (3) history of spouse or child abuse, or sexual misconduct, if any; (4) history of fiscal mismanagement, if any; and (5) legal status in the country of residence.

If the results of the background check reveal any problem area, the Credentials Committee may require professional counseling at the candidate's expense. In some situations, there may be a re-evaluation of the fitness for Christian ministry.

If a candidate for credentialing has been divorced for any reason, including because of the spouse's adultery or abandonment, and seeks vocational credentialing, the Credentials Committee is advised to give serious and careful consideration to problems for ministry that may arise from this situation.

2.1.3 The Theological and Biblical Qualification

CREDENTIALING IS FOR THOSE WHO POSSESS A WELL-DEVELOPED AND SCRIPTURALLY VALID BELIEF SYSTEM AND WHOSE LIVES GIVE INDICATION OF THE ASSIMILATION OF THAT BELIEF SYSTEM.

Bible Content Assessment. All candidates for vocational credentialing will be required to complete satisfactorily the *Bible Content Assessment*. *Leadership Focus* will take responsibility for preparing this survey and establishing the level for its successful completion by credentialing candidates. The primary purpose of the survey is to determine the current level of competence and then direct in a plan for achieving needed growth. Unacceptable results will require parallel modules within *Leadership Focus* to address areas of needed strengthening. Additional requirements may be identified by the candidate's Credentials Committee.

Theological Beliefs Assessment. When being assessed for biblical and theological understanding within the program of *Leadership Focus* (and subsequently by the Credentials Committee), it will not suffice for a candidate to quote a few biblical prooftexts. Nor is it enough to set forth by rote a few creedal-sounding statements

that appear traditional. It is only enough to have a broad foundation of theological method and conviction that encompasses, in principle at least, all the issues of life as they pertain to the nature and activity of God. It is only enough when such convictions dictate one's position on moral issues and when, in the midst of crisis, they provide a reason for the hope that lies within (1 Peter 3:15). Scripture itself prescribes the minister's theological qualifications, portraying the minister as one who is "able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confront those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9).

Theological understanding can never rest on intellectual investigation alone. By its very nature, it must be experiential as well as academic. Theology ultimately arises out of one's own encounter with the loving embrace of God. True theologizing cannot be done by the unspiritual person, since such a person lacks the insight provided by the presence and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. All ministers should be "theologians." One cannot qualify as a Christian theologian apart from the initial and continuing experience of God's transforming and enlightening grace. One's theological qualifications for vocational credentialing cannot be examined without simultaneously examining the candidate's spiritual qualifications. One can speak authoritatively about God only if one can declare, "I know in whom I have believed" (2 Tim. 1:12).

All candidates for vocational credentialing will be asked to prepare a written statement of their beliefs regarding the seven commitments listed below. Candidates also will be asked to state how these commitments find practical application in their own lives and ministries. This written statement will be discussed and assessed within the context of *Leadership Focus* and then evaluated by the candidate's Credentials Committee.

The seven theological commitments are:

1. **Trinitarian Theology.** The doctrine of the Trinity means there is one God who eternally exists as three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While there are three distinct persons, each person of the Trinity is fully God.
2. **Sin and Salvation.** Both original sin and our sin separated us from God. Jesus Christ lived a holy life, was crucified on the Cross, and rose from the dead so that we could receive salvation. Through the faithfulness and grace of Jesus, we are empowered by Holy Spirit to choose this gift.
3. **Holiness.** The Holy Spirit continues to transform us by renewing our minds, understandings, and convictions to align with the mind and heart of Jesus. We are equipped with gifts of the Spirit and empowered to resist the enemy's temptation and to do the work and will of Father God for the mission of the Church.
4. **Nature and Authority of the Bible.** The Bible is the authoritative word of God and our rule of faith. This commitment impacts the way we study the Bible, preach, and how we live holy lives.

5. **Imago Dei.** We were created in the image of God. This unique relationship impacts how we worship and our relationship with all those created in God's image. Every woman and man who has experienced salvation is gifted by the Holy Spirit and has a unique destiny.
6. **The Kingdom of God.** The Kingdom is reigning here and now, and as such, citizens of the Kingdom have the power to daily live victoriously in Christ. We have everything needed for every good work and for fulfilling the mission God gave us.
7. **Unity.** Unity is a means for revealing the nature of God, the transformed life in the Kingdom, and our deep commitment to the mission of reaching the lost. Unity is impossible without holiness, and holiness is evidenced by our unity.

Although the Church of God honors theological freedom within the bounds of biblically based belief, those to whom vocational credentialing is granted are expected to hold persuasions that are in general agreement with the Church of God Teaching Tradition. *Leadership Focus* will provide each candidate with a syllabus outlining the required readings, recommended resources, and activities related to this topic. The credentialing Assembly may supplement these as it deems appropriate.

The candidate for vocational credentialing is expected to understand and affirm: (1) the historic theological traditions of the Church of God; (2) the moral/ethical stances included elsewhere in this *Credentials Manual* (sections 2.1.2. and 7.3.3); and (3) all related matters affirmed by the direct action of the General Assembly of the Church of God.

2.1.4 The Dispositional and Relational Qualifications

CREDENTIALING IS FOR THOSE WHOSE PERSONAL DISPOSITION IS CONSISTENTLY IN KEEPING WITH THAT EXPECTED OF A REPRESENTATIVE OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE CHURCH.

The personality and performance of ministers are indivisible. If the gospel message is to be credible and contagious, ministers must be credible and contagious themselves. If their services are to be welcomed, they themselves must be welcomed. Their presence should affect others in positive ways. Ideally, their manner will be a reflection of their walk with Christ and will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. They will demonstrate a high degree of emotional maturity, as evidenced by mastery of their own attitudes. Professional poise should be evident in a range of circumstances.

Leadership Focus will be responsible for providing an effective and meaningful assessment process throughout a candidate's experience in LF. In addition, LF will be responsible to provide each candidate with a well-trained person who will debrief the candidate in assessment results and discuss possible learning points. LF also will provide the candidate's Credentials Committee with a written debriefing report so that it is able to understand and support any necessary actions.

The candidate's dispositional and relational qualifications for ministry may be measured by such scriptural mandates as Matthew 5:22, 1 Corinthians 13:1-7, Galatians 5:22, Philippians 2:3-5, and Hebrews 12:14. In assessing a candidate's fitness for vocational credentialing, an assembly's Credentials Committee, directly or through the supervising mentor, shall consider questions including the following. Is the candidate...

- Susceptible to wide mood swings?
- Prepared to cope constructively with disagreement?
- Prepared to endure rejection and denial?
- Inclined to pout, threaten, berate, or otherwise manipulate?
- Chronically negative in outlook?
- Consistently congenial and approachable?
- A calming influence in the midst of crisis?
- Objective in judgment?
- Sensitive to the feelings of others and aware of how others experience the candidate?
- Self-controlled?
- Adaptable?
- Affirming of others?
- Excessively phobic or neurotic?
- Appropriately self-critical?
- A "team player" capable of leading, honoring, and building up colleagues in the process?
- Quick to anger? Prone to defensiveness?

Christian ministry requires a high level of emotional adjustment and social skill. It is imperative to identify any destructive tendencies. If married, vocational Christian ministry also requires a spouse who is supportive of the ministerial call.

Since it is virtually impossible to find answers to the above questions in a single interview, Credentials Committees are urged to (1) consider the written debrief provided through *Leadership Focus*; (2) take under advisement the coaching reports provided by LF coaches at the end of each module; (3) consult with the candidate's supervising mentor who can observe the candidate in a variety of settings; and (4) recommend or require professional counseling as may be indicated.

2.1.5 The Educational Qualification

CREDENTIALING IS FOR THOSE WHO ARE COMMITTED TO ADEQUATE EDUCATION FOR THE MINISTERIAL PROFESSION.

Early in its history, the Church of God recognized the need for ministerial preparation. Both history and experience reinforce the need for an adequately prepared ministry in order to function effectively in today's complex world. This preparation not only focuses on the beginning period of entering ministry but extends throughout one's ministry, regardless of academic degrees earned. While the church affirms that God provides divine gifts to called servants for ministry, it likewise affirms that refinement of such gifts is always needed and that other abilities and skills must be developed. For further requirements related to the necessity of continuing education, see section 7.1.2.

There should be a formal structure of ministerial preparation to enable the fuller presence of what the New Testament requires (1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1). This biblical requirement includes a divine call, a divine endowment to help implement the call, emotional and spiritual maturity, and a program of significant study to better inform and enable the accomplishment of God's call to ministry.

It is strongly recommended that all vocational ministers of the Church of God attain a seminary education or its equivalent. However, the diversity of circumstances out of which Church of God ministers respond to God's call necessitates flexibility in ministerial preparation. The Credentials Committee will determine what is appropriate for each candidate based on individual circumstances. That may include degree-based formal education, specific continuing education units, training conferences or other avenues of study. Regardless of what plan of preparation is chosen as most appropriate, all candidates will fulfill the program of *Leadership Focus*.

2.1.6 The Vocational Qualification

CREDENTIALING IS FOR THOSE WHO ARE PEERS IN POSITION AND PERFORMANCE OF THOSE WHO ARE VOCATIONALLY ENGAGED IN PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

In most instances, the appropriateness of a candidate's pursuit of vocational credentialing should be obvious. The service to the church is of such nature, and the tenure of that service is of such duration, as to commend vocational credentialing. Obedient and joyful response to the call of God leads an individual to the vocation of

ministry. As described in Scripture (such as Acts 9:1-19, 13:1-5, 1 Timothy 4:11-16, and Jeremiah 1:4-10), the vocation of ministry becomes a consuming passion.

There are, however, some cases in which vocational credentialing is questionable. This is especially true when the service rendered is not typically classified as professional ministry or the candidate is not routinely engaged in such ministry. Vocational ministry is much more than sharing leadership roles in the church (such as Sunday school teacher, worship leader, usher, etc.). While all leaders are called to be witnesses of the gospel and gifted leaders in the church, some are set apart and called by God for the vocation of Word, ordinances, ministry, and mission.

Readiness for vocational ministry may be recognized in preparation (what we do), enabling (what God does in us), and the developing of wisdom (what we become). Readiness begins with a call and launches the candidate on a path of commitment and preparation. Vocational ministry requires a high level of readiness and a consuming passion to make ministry one's vocation. In cases where the appropriateness of seeking vocational credentialing is questionable, the guidelines for the recognition and credentialing of ministers found in section 1, and the conditions for granting vocational credentialing found in section 2.2, shall determine what form of recognition or credentialing is appropriate.

2.2 Conditions for Granting Vocational Credentialing

Those charged with granting credentialing to vocational Christian ministers must be guided by principles that are consistent with sound judgment and fair practice; they also must be held in high regard by the body of ministers. Otherwise, subjective decisions will be made and irregularities will result. Some may be credentialed undeservingly; others may be denied unfairly. In approaching the decision to recommend credentialing to vocational Christian ministry, Credentials Committees should be guided by the following principles and conditions.

2.2.1 Reasonable Doubt Is Removed

Credentialing to vocational Christian ministry will not be granted until its advisability is beyond reasonable doubt. If, at the end of the one or two-year period used for background checks, interviews, and working with the supervising mentor (as called for in section 3), questions remain regarding the kind and quality of the candidate's ministerial service, about the regularity of that service, about doctrinal readiness, personal and professional fitness, unresolved matters in background checks, or lifelong intent to pursue vocational ministry, vocational credentialing will be delayed and the candidate's file kept open. In most cases, time will reveal whether vocational credentialing is in order. It should be the Credentials Committee's position that it is always less painful to delay than to revoke or tolerate the consequences of premature credentialing.

2.2.2 The Ministry is Overtly Religious in Nature

Vocational credentialing will be granted only to those whose ministerial service is overtly religious in nature. While there is much Christian service that is laudable and doubtless honored by our Lord, not all service is Christian ministry in the vocational sense. Those practices that are basically secular, humanitarian, and/or common to all servants of Jesus Christ do not warrant vocational credentialing. If credentials are not required for performance of the service, and not strategic to the professional status of those offering the service, or if the public perception of the candidate is not that of a Christian minister, then vocational credentialing is not in order.

Vocational credentialing is reserved for those who are engaged in Christian ministry in a way that is primary and not incidental to their ministerial call and exercise. This does not mean that those ministers who must supplement their incomes with employment in other than Christian ministry shall be ineligible for vocational credentialing, but that Christian ministry must be the primary calling to which they are responding.

2.2.3 Candidate Is Gifted and Willing for Vocational Christian Ministry

Vocational credentialing shall be granted only to those who have been divinely called and have demonstrated a sustained willingness, ability, and spiritual giftedness to engage in professional Christian ministry.

A minimum of one year of continuous and satisfactory service in a bona fide ministerial position is required prior to ordination, unless other arrangements are made with the Credentials Committee. In addition, candidates must declare their intention to engage in the same or equal levels of ministry in the future and be deemed by their abilities likely to obtain such opportunity.

A statement of intention to serve in Christian ministry does not in itself constitute justification for vocational credentialing. Exceptions may be made when such credentialing is a requirement for placement, such as with chaplaincy positions, or when the lack of credentials inhibits the gaining of vocational ministry placement by a candidate clearly called to, dedicated to, and well prepared for vocational ministry through the Church of God Movement. Typically, such preparation is to be demonstrated at least by having successfully completed the *Leadership Focus* program and having some history of ministry successfully engaged.

2.2.4 Involvement Is Substantial; Ministry Is Professional

Vocational credentialing shall be granted only to those whose involvement in Christian ministry is substantial and whose position is generally considered professional in nature (see section 1.4). Unremunerated and informal service shall not apply toward experience required for vocational credentialing, except where it clearly shows that substantial ministry, such as would normally be provided by a remunerated person, has been rendered.

The practice of creating positions and bestowing titles in order to create justification for vocational credentialing should not be honored by Credentials Committees. If ordination is to be honored by God and respected by the church and the world, it must not serve as the primary basis for the minister's recognition, but rather as acknowledgment of what God obviously has done and intends through the life of a called, committed, and gifted ministerial servant.

SECTION 3

THE CREDENTIALING PROCESS

Contents of This Section:

- 3.1 Responsibilities of the Candidate**
- 3.2 Responsibilities of the Credentials Committee**
- 3.3 Responsibilities of *Leadership Focus***
- 3.4 When Ordination Has Been Approved**
 - 3.4.1 Responsibilities of the Credentials Committee**
 - 3.4.2 The Service of Ordination**
 - 3.4.3 Certificates and Registration of Ordination**

SECTION 3

THE CREDENTIALING PROCESS

It is the responsibility of the Credentials Committee of each Assembly of the Church of God to make decisions about licensing, ordaining, registering, and disciplining ministers and congregations. It will create and maintain a file for each congregation, minister, and ministerial candidate in the jurisdiction of its Assembly. See elsewhere in this Manual for more information on the roles and vital importance of Credentials Committees and their proper training.

Leadership Focus serves each Credentials Committee and Assembly of the Church of God by providing for ministerial and missional candidates a comprehensive program of ministerial ordination preparation. Particular roles and responsibilities are detailed here and more fully elsewhere by *Leadership Focus*. *LF* works in coordination with the appropriate Credentials Committee. Select roles and responsibilities follow.

3.1 Responsibilities of the Candidate

A person sensing a call to vocational ministry will contact the appropriate Credentials Committee or Assembly office of the Church of God and be prepared to give evidence of:

1. Their sense of divine call to vocational Christian ministry;
2. Their willingness to submit to the Committee's guidance for extended training and equipping;
3. Their desire to seek credentials in order to fulfill their call to vocational ministry;
4. Their willingness to be available for an initial interview with the Credentials Committee.

3.2 Responsibilities of the Credentials Committee

It is essential that the Credentials Committee of an Assembly fully understand that, while *Leadership Focus* is a critical partner in the training, equipping and evaluating of each candidate, these are the responsibilities of the Credentials Committee:

1. To receive and respond to each inquiry regarding credentialing in a timely and helpful manner.
2. The Committee will identify the appropriate person from the state/regional/provincial office or credentials committee to meet with each person inquiring for introduction, answering questions, and determining readiness for entry into the credentialing process.

3. For candidates approved to enter the credentialing process, the credentialing administrator will assist the candidate in the use of the *Leadership Focus* portal and support them in fulfilling all the requirements for entrance as listed in the LF portal.
4. The Credentials Committee will monitor each candidate's progress, or lack of progress, throughout each LF module and communicate with the candidate the concerns, encouragement, and support needed to progress successfully through all modules.
5. To determine any additional assignments or experiences (within reason) beyond LF that a credentials committee deems critical to the candidate's readiness for ministry.
6. It is also the responsibility of each credentials committee to mark assignments as completed in a timely fashion; move forward or hold their candidates at the end of each module; and work in collaboration with *Leadership Focus* staff to determine financial obligations of the candidate and the assembly per module.
7. Maintain candidate credential files (digital or paper) with completed assignments. It is the responsibility of each credentials committee member to read each candidate's submission in their file in preparation for meetings and credential actions.
8. Adhere to the *Leadership Focus* timeline for all actions.

3.3 Responsibilities of *Leadership Focus*

Leadership Focus will, within the guidelines and goals of this *Credentials Manual* of the Church of God, serve the Assemblies and Credentials Committees of the Church of God by:

1. **Resourcing** the Credentials Committee with required information completed by the candidate, including the forms "Ministerial Endorsement" and "Authorization to Request, Maintain, and Release Information."
2. **Implementing** for the ministerial candidate a comprehensive program of preparation modules for ordination to vocational ministry through the Church of God;
3. **Providing** the candidate with a cluster context guided by experienced coaches and a rich pattern of resources and accountabilities. To the degree possible, the format of these resources will be adjusted to accommodate a candidate's special circumstances.

4. **Providing** to the Credentials Committee the submissions of their candidates, evaluations of their coach, and the tools to assist in determining the candidate's readiness for ordained ministry through the Church of God, including:
 - A. Personal behavior and motivational profiles, emotional intelligence, strengths of leadership, and giftedness for ministry;
 - B. Working knowledge of Scripture and Christian doctrines through implementing and evaluating a *Bible Content Assessment* and written statements by the candidate on *Theological Beliefs* (focused on the critical theological subjects listed elsewhere in this Manual), and;
 - C. Written development of a candidate's *LAMP* (Life and Ministry Plan). The assessments, theological statements, and *LAMP* will be processed with the candidate's cluster and coach and will be uploaded by the candidate into the *Leadership* portal for the Credential Committee's awareness and ability to further evaluate and process with the candidate.
5. Supplying the appropriate Credentials Committee with regular and informative reports on the candidate's participation, growth, and evidence of readiness. These will come from the cluster coach at the close of each preparation module. All materials related to assignments completed by the candidate during the module also will be made available to the Credentials Committee so that it is fully informed of the candidate's progress. In this way, *Leadership Focus* supports the Credentials Committee as it makes credentialing decisions throughout the candidate's preparation journey.

3.4 When Ordination Has Been Approved

3.4.1 Responsibilities of the Credentials Committee

At such time as a candidate is judged by the Credentials Committee to be ready for ordination, the committee shall pursue the following steps, always subject to the bylaws of the appropriate state, regional, or provincial assembly of the church:

- A. Seek approval by the assembly responsible for ministerial recognition. At the earliest opportunity, the minister's name will be presented to the appropriate body, with the recommendation that ordination be granted.
- B. Arrange for an ordination service. According to specifications established by the Credentials Committee, and with consideration of the candidate's desires, the committee and the candidate shall plan jointly for the service of ordination. This service can be in the candidate's home church or in an assembly or other appropriate meeting of the church.

- C. The Ordination Covenant is to be signed by the candidate and a copy filed with both the assembly and Church of God Ministries.

3.4.2 The Service of Ordination

The service of ordination should be one of dignity and meaning—a time to be remembered and cherished. Any such service should include at least recognition by ministerial peers in the Church of God, support of the larger church community, and affirmation of Christian ministry by the one being ordained.

3.4.3 Certificates and Registration of Ordination

Church of God Ministries is the official registrar of credentialing certificates for the ministry of the Church of God in the United States. Each assembly, when it grants credentials, acts on behalf of the whole church; therefore, its actions and formal recognitions should conform to those of other assemblies. Church of God Ministries cannot be responsible for correctly certifying a minister's status as one properly ordained unless official notification is given to it by the ordaining Assembly and the ordination is then recorded by Church of God Ministries.

SECTION 4

REGISTRATION FOR CHURCH OF GOD MINISTERS AND CONGREGATIONS

Contents of This Section:

4.1 Responsibilities of Church of God Ministries, Inc.

4.2 Responsibilities of the Credentials Committee

- 4.2.1** The Committee Responsibilities for the Registration of Ministers Moving Out of or Into its Jurisdiction
- 4.2.2** Use of the Congregational Attributes

4.3 Responsibilities of Individual Ministers and Congregations

- 4.3.1** Initiative for Participation and Registration
- 4.3.2** Required Date
- 4.3.3** Moving During Registration Period
- 4.3.4** The Right of Appeal
- 4.3.5** *Yearbook* Title Codes

4.4 Responsibilities of Specialized Ministers and Ministry Groups

- 4.4.1** Specialized Ministers
- 4.4.2** Specialized Ministry Groups

4.5 Failure to Register by Ministers and Congregations

- 4.5.1** Ministers Not Registering
- 4.5.2** Congregations Not Registering

SECTION 4

REGISTRATION OF CHURCH OF GOD MINISTERS AND CONGREGATIONS

4.1 Responsibilities of Church of God Ministries, Inc.

1. Establish the process, procedures, and schedule for annual registration of ministers and congregations.
2. Inform ministers, congregations, Credentials Committee chairs, and/or assembly offices of the registration process, procedures, and schedules.
3. Provide definitions of classifications for ministers to be used in the *Yearbook*. See below for more detail about classifications and their definitions.
4. Make available to each assembly a list of all ministers and congregations eligible to register for the purpose of indicating the current approval status of each minister and congregation.
5. Make available upon request of an assembly the information gathered through the registration process for ministers and congregations within that assembly.

4.2 Responsibilities of the Credentials Committee

- A. Maintain up to date information of all ministers whose credentials are held by that assembly. The list should include current classification, contact information, and approval status of each minister. It is very important that only recognized, approved, and credentialed ministers be listed.
- B. Maintain a current list of all congregations within the jurisdiction of that assembly. The list should include contact information and current approval status. Congregations with provisional status are to be included. It is very important that only congregations must be listed that are complying with the sixteen expected attributes of Church of God congregations found in section 6.1.1.
- C. Review, at least annually, the lists of ministers and congregations of its respective assembly accessed via the Church of God shared database.
 1. Compare the lists with those maintained by the assembly;
 2. Update all information in the shared database;
 3. Submit the proper forms to report actions taken (transfer, official notification, etc.).

4.2.1 The Credentials Committee's Responsibilities for Ministers Moving Out of or Into Its Jurisdiction

- A.** For the minister moving out of a jurisdiction to transfer with clear recommendation, the moving minister will contact in writing the regional pastor, overseer, and/or credentials committee chair in the assembly where currently ministering and request that an Inter-Assembly Transfer be sent to the Credentials Committee in the jurisdiction to which one is moving (see section 5.3.1 A). In this way, proper transfer and recommendation can occur between assemblies (see sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2). The sending assembly also will submit the transfer to Church of God Ministries. If there are any problems, it is expected that the chair of the receiving Credentials Committee will be informed. The minister's professional file or record will also be sent (see sections 3.1 and 5.3.2 C). If problems are discovered after the minister's departure, the chair of the Credentials Committee of the receiving assembly will be informed.
- B.** A Credentials Committee will approve ministers moving into its jurisdiction on these conditions:
 - 1.** Approve on condition that there is in hand a letter of recommendation by the assembly from which the minister comes, provided that the sending and receiving assemblies are both following the guidelines of this *Credentials Manual*. If different guidelines are being followed, further investigation may be necessary before approval can take place. See section .
 - 2.** If there was a pending investigation or a call for possible disciplinary action before the minister moved, that minister should first receive clearance and approval by the sending Credentials Committee before seeking approval by the receiving assembly.
- C.** Church of God Ministries will proceed to register on the following basis:
 - 1.** If a registered minister moves after the approved lists have been returned to Church of God Ministries and is too late to be approved by the new Credentials Committee, that minister will be registered on the basis of approval by the original assembly.
 - 2.** If a serious problem is reported by the sending assembly or Credentials Committee, that minister will not be registered by the receiving assembly until the matter has been resolved.

4.2.2 Use of the Congregational Attributes.

Congregational status, as defined by the attributes of a congregation associated with the Church of God (identified in Section 6.1.1), will be used by the Credentials Committee to evaluate the annual certification of congregations. In addition, the Credentials Committee will evaluate a congregation as to its due diligence in following

policies related to the screening and supervising of all volunteers and employed staff, and in having procedures in place to be followed if allegations of improper conduct occur.

Any congregation that conforms in intent and usual practice to this model may be recognized as a Church of God congregation and approved for listing in the Church of God's annual Yearbook.

4.3 Responsibilities of the Individual Minister and the Congregation

4.3.1 Initiative for Participation and Registration.

In order to foster fellowship and accountability with the Church of God, each minister is expected to attend regular meetings of ministerial colleagues, as defined by the appropriate state/regional/provincial assembly, and to register annually.

The initiative for the annual registration is the responsibility of the individual minister and congregation. All eligible ministers and congregations will be informed of the process, procedures, and deadlines. Ministers or congregations that do not receive this information should contact Church of God Ministries.

Ministers who fail for two consecutive years to honor this covenant relationship of participation and registration are subject to the suspension of their ministerial credentials for six (6) months. Unless such suspension is successfully appealed, those credentials will be revoked.

4.3.2 The Required Date.

Registration must be completed by the stated deadlines. Failure to do so may result in the minister's name not appearing in the next *Yearbook* issue. Approval for appearing in the *Yearbook* listing is dependent on concurrence of the minister's state/area/provincial assembly. It is, therefore, the minister's responsibility to insure that all requirements have been met.

4.3.3 Moving During the Registration Period.

The minister who moves during the time of annual registration should take the initiative to inform the Credentials Committee of the assembly being left so that proper recommendation can occur.

4.3.4 The Right of Appeal.

If refused registration approval, the ministerial applicant shall have the right of appeal. In the event that a person is not approved, Church of God Ministries will make a reasonable attempt to notify that person promptly and advise the minister to contact the Credentials Committee of the appropriate assembly to discuss the possibility of the decision being reversed. In the event that the approved list is returned too late to allow for the appeal process, a representative of Church of God Ministries may confer with the assembly credentialing chair to determine the applicant's eligibility for registration, and only then approve a name previously identified as not approved.

4.3.5 Yearbook Title Codes.

Each person successfully registering and thus eligible for inclusion in the *Yearbook* of the Church of God may select from the established list of codes the designation that best describes that person's primary ministerial status. Only those persons whose ministries conform to one of the listed designations will appear in the *Yearbook*. Others are likely to be denied approval. The current designations of ministry categories (codes) and their definitions are maintained by Church of God Ministries and are used in a uniform way by all credentialing jurisdictions.

4.4 Responsibilities of Specialized Ministers and Specialized Ministry Groups

4.4.1 Specialized Ministers.

Some ministers are engaged in specialized ministries that make it impossible for them to be a part of the active life of any assembly of the Church of God. Church of God Ministries must accept responsibility in such special cases.

Examples:

Military Chaplains.

These persons are routinely moved to all parts of the world.

Institutional Chaplains.

Church of God Ministries endorses institutional chaplains who often are so involved that they cannot get to assembly meetings regularly; their accountability, however, is still the responsibility of the appropriate assembly.

Isolated Ministers. Some ministers are located in isolated geographic areas or taking advanced training where participating regularly in the life of the appropriate assembly is not possible.

Other Ministers. Some ministers who serve outside of North America or are employed by Church of God Ministries will have their credentials maintained by Indiana Ministries, as arranged by Church of God Ministries.

4.4.2 Specialized Ministry Groups.

A person or specialized ministry group wishing to be listed in the *Yearbook* in the Directory of Organizations must be approved annually by the credentialing body with jurisdiction where the home office of the ministry is located. The minister or group shall supply needed information and appear for interviews as requested. The appropriate Credentials Committee shall certify that each free-standing ministry seeking *Yearbook* listing meets the following conditions:

- A.** Is engaged in genuine Christian ministry;
- B.** Is led by persons clearly identified with the Church of God;
- C.** Maintains harmonious working relationships with the ministries of the Church of God related to its area of ministry service; and
- D.** Presents annually to the certifying assembly detailed financial statements showing solvency and responsibility.

4.5 Failure of Ministers or Congregations to Register

4.5.1 Ministers Not Registering

If a minister fails to register with Church of God Ministries for two or more consecutive years, the minister will be notified by the appropriate assembly that credentials are being suspended for 6 (six) months. If there is no acceptable response at the end of this period, a certified letter of warning will be sent by the appropriate assembly. It should include the awareness of the potential loss of IRS status. If an acceptable response is not received within 30 (thirty) days, credentials will be revoked and the minister's name removed from the assembly's approved list. Reference to "IRS status" is to the legal and tax systems of the United States. This stance is also intended as appropriate within the Canadian legal and tax systems.

A minister whose credentials have been revoked for failure to register can be reinstated by the appropriate Credentials Committee if the minister seeks reinstatement of credentials through proper application to the Credentials Committee and gives acceptable reasons, in the discretion of the Credentials Committee, for the failure to register.

Exceptions may be made for retired ministers. Ministers serving with other church bodies (ecumenical ministers) must be intentional about maintaining meaningful connection with the Church of God or risk having their credentials revoked.

4.5.2 Congregations Not Registering

Because of legal statutes applicable to not-for-profit organizations, it is essential that Church of God congregations register annually with their state/regional/provincial assemblies and with Church of God Ministries, Inc.

If a congregation fails to register for two consecutive years, that congregation will lose its membership in the General Assembly of the Church of God and be removed from Church of God Ministries' Group 501(c)(3) tax status. If a congregation is removed from Church of God Ministries' Group 501(c)(3) tax status and does not have its own separate 501(c)(3) designation from the Internal Revenue Service, it will lose its ability to issue tax-exempt giving statements and suffer other potential ramifications, including no longer being eligible to submit charitable contribution reports for IRS purposes.

Prior to such removal, a certified letter of warning will be sent by the appropriate assembly to the pastor and the chair of the congregation's governing board. It should include the awareness of the potential loss of IRS status. Note: Reference to "IRS status" is to the legal and tax systems of the United States. This stance is also intended as appropriate within the Canadian legal and tax systems.

SECTION 5

WHEN MINISTERS MOVE FROM ONE ASSEMBLY TO ANOTHER

Contents of This Section

5.1 Accountability for Inter-Assembly Transfers

5.2 Policy Objectives

5.3 Implementation Procedures

5.3.1 Responsibilities of the Minister When Transferring to the Jurisdiction of
Another Assembly

5.3.2 Responsibilities of the Credentials Committee When a Minister Is
Moving

5.3.3 Responsibilities of the Credentials Committee to the Congregation
Whose Its Pastor Is Moving

5.3.4 Responsibilities of the Congregation When the Position of
Senior Pastor Becomes Vacant

SECTION 5

WHEN MINISTERS MOVE FROM ONE ASSEMBLY TO ANOTHER

5.1 Accountability for Inter-Assembly Transfers

The accountability of a minister is to the assembly in whose jurisdiction the ministry is being performed. When the ministry is through an organizational satellite of a ministry located in another assembly's jurisdiction, the primary accountability remains with the assembly where the ministry is being performed. The assemblies involved in a satellite instance will seek to communicate and coordinate functions to the degree possible.

Because Church of God ministers move frequently from one credentialing jurisdiction to another—and on occasion leave behind unenviable records and reputations, it is necessary to provide for an orderly tracking of the migration of all ministers. The Inter-Assembly Transfer is the means used. An Inter-Assembly Transfer provides vital information to the receiving assembly.

Each minister is accountable to the assembly with jurisdiction in the area within which that minister serves. Accountability to the church cannot be escaped merely by moving from one credentialing jurisdiction to another. This accountability is protected through the use of Inter Assembly Transfers. When transferring, the minister's original professional file, with limitations (see section 5.3.2), is to be forwarded to the new assembly, along with the Inter Assembly Transfer form.

5.2 Policy Objectives

The three reasons for a stated policy that regulates inter-assembly transfers are:

1. To aid pastors and congregations in making smooth transitions.
2. To involve assembly administrators and Credentials Committees in the process of filling vacant pastoral positions.
3. To control the flow of disruptive ministers from one assembly to another without proper awareness of the receiving assembly. See section 7.4.3.

5.3 Implementation Procedures

5.3.1 Responsibilities of the Minister When Transferring to the Jurisdiction of Another Assembly

- A.** When deciding to leave the jurisdiction of an assembly, the minister will immediately request the Credentials Committee to send an Inter-Assembly Transfer form to the receiving Credentials Committee.
- B.** When leaving an educational institution, the student minister will have the institution send a Student Recommendation Form to the receiving assembly as one of the prerequisites for licensing.
- C.** Compliance with these procedures will be a part of the requirements for the continued listing of ministers on the approved list of credentialed ministers.

5.3.2 Responsibilities of the Credentials Committee When a Minister Is Moving

- A.** When a minister planning to move requests that an Inter-Assembly Transfer form be sent to the receiving Credentials Committee, the sending assembly must forward this form within 30 days of notification.
- B.** If the Release of Information Form is not already properly signed and included as part of the transferring minister's professional file, the file will not be sent. It is imperative that a signed form be sent with a transferred file to the receiving assembly and a copy retained by the sending assembly. Should the minister refuse, a report of the refusal shall be shared in writing with the chair of the Credentials Committee of the receiving assembly.
- C.** With the signed Release of Information Form included (a copy retained by the sending committee), the entire professional file of the transferring minister is to be forwarded to the chair of the receiving Credentials Committee, except for any confidential materials related to problems of the past that have been fully resolved to the satisfaction of the Credentials Committee. If copies of such materials are retained by the Credentials Committee in the jurisdiction the minister is moving from, they will be held in keeping with the guidelines in sub-section 7.3.6 C. A report of the existence and general nature of such past issues, however, shall be included for the information of the receiving assembly.
- D.** Sending assemblies may maintain a copy file if it contains information related to any proceedings and charges against the transferring minister that occurred while in its jurisdiction.

5.3.3 Responsibilities of the Credentials Committee to the Congregation Whose Pastor Is Moving

- A.** Each Assembly is urged to develop and implement a partnership with each congregation in its jurisdiction, thus assuring that congregations understand their responsibility to work with the assembly office in selecting a pastor.
- B.** Each Assembly is urged to develop a packet of resources to make available to congregations to assist them in finding new pastors.
- C.** When learning that a congregation is without a pastor, the regional pastor/overseer, state/assembly office or, when neither is available, the assembly's Credentials Committee chair will visit and dialogue with the congregation concerning:
 - The desire to have the congregation involve the assembly office or Credentials Committee in the pastoral selection process;
 - The need to call a senior pastor who is approved or likely to gain approval by the assembly; and
 - Ways that the assembly may assist the congregation in making the healthiest leadership transition possible.

5.3.4 Responsibilities of the Congregation When the Position of Senior Pastor Becomes Vacant

- A.** To notify assembly leadership of a pastoral opening and search.
- B.** To involve the assembly's office or Credentials Committee in the pastoral selection process.
- C.** To be aware of the need for Ministerial Inter-Assembly Transfers.
- D.** To call a senior pastor who is credentialed by the Church of God or immediately will enter the credentialing process.

It is to be understood that compliance with these responsibilities will be a part of the requirements for continued recognition of a congregation as an approved congregation of the Church of God.

SECTION 6

RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION OF CONGREGATIONS

Contents of this Section

6.1 Recognition and Certification of Established Congregations

- 6.1.1** Attributes of a Church of God Congregation
- 6.1.2** Policy Regarding a Non-Conforming Congregation

6.2 Recognition and Certification of New Congregations

- 6.2.1** When a New Congregation Results from the Fracturing of an Existing Congregation
- 6.2.2** Provisional Status: Standards and Procedures for New Congregations Resulting from a Church Fracture
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- 6.5.1** Questions to Be Addressed
- 6.5.2** Policies and Procedures to Be Followed

SECTION 6

RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION OF CONGREGATIONS

6.1 Recognition and Certification of Established Congregations

6.1.1 Attributes of a Church of God Congregation

An established congregation of the Church of God should be characterized by the following attributes across four aspects of ministry. An established congregation:

Church Ministry

1. Is a nurturing local body of believers providing fellowship, inspiration, and support to all within its reach.
2. Is obedient to God's call to mission at home and around the world.
3. Provides opportunity for growing in Christian grace and equipping for service.
4. Lives in harmony with the doctrines and teachings of the Word of God as commonly understood by the Church of God Teaching Tradition. To learn more about our doctrines and teachings, see resources, including but not limited to, *The Heart of the Church of God Teaching Tradition* (Barry Callen & Cliff Sanders), *Theology for Disciples* (Gilbert Stafford), and *Church of God as Revealed in Scripture* (Arlo Newell).
5. Upholds a lifestyle characterized by holiness, service, justice, equity, and wise stewardship, as taught by the Bible and consistent with established practices of the Church of God.

Church Leadership

6. Is supportive, respectful, and nurturing of all deserving overseers, including its pastor(s) and duly elected leaders.
7. Invites the counsel of the state office, area assembly's Credentials Committee, regional pastor/overseer, and/or Church of God Ministries during times of pastoral change or congregational conflict.
8. Abides by the procedures for calling a new pastor as outlined in the section of this *Credentials Manual* titled "When Ministers Move..." (see section 5).
9. Is governed by the Holy Spirit, giving decisional authority to pastors and lay leaders as one way to allow Christ preeminence in all things.
10. Calls and retains on a long-term basis only senior pastors who are approved or likely to gain approval by the assembly under whose jurisdiction that pastor resides.

Kingdom Citizenship

11. Is involved in area, district, state, and national ministries of the Church of God, including such joint activities as worship, training, recreation, and mission projects.
12. Endeavors to live peaceably as pastors and members with one another and their neighbors.
13. Registers annually and otherwise intentionally links itself to the life of the Church of God.

Church Stewardship

14. By both prayer and financial support, contributes to the world mission of the church through the cooperative ministries of the Church of God.
15. Maintains liability insurance and indicates such during each annual registration. This insurance must include sexual misconduct.
16. For the safeguarding of Kingdom assets, is encouraged to maintain in its articles of incorporation a conditional deeding clause, with the beneficiary being the appropriate state, provincial, or area organization of the Church of God.
 - i. It is crucial that the conditional deeding clause be properly registered with the appropriate public entity for it to be legally binding.
 - ii. It also is wise that the Bylaws include a dissolution clause, including the conditional deeding arrangement and the church organization named there as beneficiary.

Any congregation that conforms in intent and usual practice to the above attributes may be recognized as a congregation of the Church of God.

6.1.2 Policy Regarding a Non-Conforming Congregation

While nothing excuses gross departures from standards that cannot be compromised, particular circumstances may encourage a Credentials Committee to be patient so long as the practices do not expose the congregation or the church at large to public disgrace or unnecessary legal liability.

In cases where congregations have clearly violated standards and practices widely embraced by the Church of God, the Credentials Committee must initiate attempts to find satisfactory resolution of the conflict. Such attempts will be guided by the material found in section 7.

6.2 Recognition and Certification of New Congregations

6.2.1 When a New Congregation Results from the Fracturing of an Existing Congregation

When a new congregation results from a fracture, whether or not the Credentials Committee was involved in attempts to resolve the conflict, the Credentials Committee shall pursue the following courses of action.

- A.** As opportunity is provided, counsel with both congregations. Attempt to dissolve animosity between the congregations and between individuals within the congregations.
- B.** Promote healing of spiritual and emotional wounds.
- C.** Encourage the exercise of love in each congregation and between the congregations.
- D.** Discourage attempts by either congregation to proselytize constituents of the other.
- E.** Enable each congregation to focus on its unique mission and opportunities; foster forward thinking in both congregations.
- F.** Review the certification of the recognized congregation.
- G.** Consider, on request, the potential certification of the new congregation.

In determining whether or not to certify the new congregation, the Credentials Committee shall take into consideration such factors as these:

- A.** Is there evidence of a conciliatory and forgiving attitude toward persons affiliated with the existing congregation?
- B.** Is there a stated desire to be supportive of the teachings, practices, structures, and mission of the Church of God?
- C.** Is there reasonable likelihood of the new group becoming a viable congregation?

6.2.2 Provisional Status: Standards and Procedures for New Congregations Resulting from a Church Fracture

New congregations that give serious evidence of positive stances in regard to the above three questions may be granted provisional status. Under provisional status the Credentials Committee will take these actions:

- A.** Approve the congregation for listing in the *Yearbook* of the Church of God, but with an asterisk (as is the case with approved but unordained ministers);

- B.** Provide counsel and support, including assistance in securing a pastor or supply preachers;
- C.** Review periodically the congregation's progress to see whether or not the provisional status should be lifted and full certification granted. In no case shall full certification be granted before at least two years have elapsed from the time that provisional status was first granted.

Under provisional status, the new congregation agrees to take these actions:

- A.** With the assistance of the appropriate assembly and its Credentials Committee, sincerely address its difficulties and opportunities;
- B.** Work cooperatively with the state/area/provincial office or assembly's Credentials Committee, especially in such matters as calling a pastor and supply preachers, financial contracts, geographical location, and plans for facilities;
- C.** Clearly establish its identity as a Church of God congregation (see section 6.1.1).

6.2.3 Provisional Status: Standards and Procedures for New Congregations Resulting from Church Planting

When a new congregation results from the careful and deliberate church planting strategy of an assembly, it automatically will be granted provisional status. Under such provisional status the Credentials Committee takes these actions:

- A.** Approves the congregation for listing in the *Yearbook* of the Church of God, but with an asterisk;
- B.** Provides counsel, as requested by the assembly or one of its boards or committees, and support, including assistance in securing a pastor or supply preachers;
- C.** Reviews periodically, on behalf of the assembly or one of its boards or committees, the congregation's provisional status and, at such time as deemed appropriate, grants full certification.

Under such provisional status, the new congregation agrees to take these actions:

- A.** Works cooperatively with the Credentials Committee, especially in such matters as calling a pastor and supply preachers;
- B.** Seeks to conform to the norms set forth for all Church of God congregations (see section 6.1.1).

6.3 Responsibilities of the Credentials Committee in Potential Church Mergers

When the possibility exists that a new congregation may result from the merger of two or more Church of God congregations, or from the merger of a Church of God congregation with that of another religious body, the Credentials Committee shall be involved in the following ways:

- A.** Planning events in which common faith and values can be honestly and intensely explored.
- B.** Confessing, studying, and evaluating differences.
- C.** Considering all available options.
- D.** Participating in the process of establishing the conditions of the merger.
- E.** Determining whether or not to certify the new congregation, taking into consideration such factors as:
 - Circumstances prompting the merger.
 - Authorized bodies endorsing the merger.
 - Impact on nearby Church of God congregations.
 - Compatibility of the merged congregation with the teachings, practices, structure, and mission of the Church of God.
 - Degree to which both bodies involved cooperated with the Credentials Committee throughout the merger process.

Based on the status of the above factors, the Credentials Committee may elect to take one of the following actions:

- Grant the new congregation full certification;
 - Grant the new congregation provisional status; or
 - Not approve the new congregation.
- F.** If the merger has been approved, celebrating in the consummation of the merger.

6.4 Responsibilities of the Credentials Committee When a Congregation Desires to Newly Affiliate with the Church of God

When a congregation not previously affiliated with the Church of God indicates a desire to affiliate, the appropriate credentials committee shall serve as the official liaison for the Church of God, hosting, judging circumstances and issues, and advocating for the congregation if justified. This liaison role will include at least:

- A.** Respond graciously to the congregation's indicated desire to affiliate;

- B.** Request that the congregation in question introduce itself to the Church of God by providing the credentials committee with brief written presentations of its:
1. congregational history,
 2. theological stances,
 3. current church affiliation,
 4. current clergy persons (education and credentials),
 5. current bylaws detailing its functioning polity,
 6. reasons for wishing to affiliate with the Church of God, and
 7. current level and sources of its knowledge about the Church of God.
- C.** Introduce the Church of God to the requesting congregation by pursuing questions arising from the provided materials and providing at least:
1. The 6.1.1 section of this Credentials Manual, “Attributes of a Church of God Congregation,”
 2. The booklet “*The Heart of the Church of God Teaching Tradition,*” and
 3. Opportunity for fellowship and worship together and settings for questions to be answered and relationship building to occur.
- D.** Assess the compatibility of the new congregation with the teachings, practices, structure, and mission of the Church of God, always seeking as possible to resolve rather than merely identifying problems
- E.** Be sensitive to the potential impact of the proposed new affiliation on nearby Church of God congregations and the body being left;
- F.** If the new affiliation appears appropriate, identify likely transitional issues and help construct a mutually acceptable manner of addressing them together.

Following completion of all the above, the credentials committee will decide to take one of the following actions:

1. Recommend to its assembly that provisional certification status be granted, being clear about the issue(s) yet needing resolution; or
2. Recommend full and immediate certification of the congregation; or
3. Recommend that the congregation not be certified as affiliated.

6.5 Issues Related to a New Church Plant When a Mother Church Is Involved in the Formation of the New Group

6.5.1 Questions To Be Addressed

When a new congregation is planted through the direct involvement of a Church of God congregation, the Credentials Committee should address the following questions:

- Were problems with or within the mother church a major factor in the decision?
- Was vision for reaching new people for Christ the primary reason in forming the new group?
- Is the location for the new church already being served by another Church of God congregation?
- Is there a vision of the new group shared with the mother church's leaders, and has the vision been taken to the congregation as a whole to seek its blessing, participation, and support?

6.5.2 Policies and Procedures To Be Followed

The Credentials Committee shall follow these policies and procedures:

- A.** Seek general agreement between the church plant and the mother church regarding the procedure of this undertaking;
- B.** Make contact with congregational leaders in the area which may be affected by the location of the new work to help insure a better future relationship;
- C.** Seek and give due consideration to the advice of district, state, and/or provincial leadership;
- D.** Anticipate the financial needs of both the mother church and the new work. Have in place a financial plan for launch-time and for continuing support;
- E.** Before the actual launch of the new work:
 - Ensure that some organizational structure within the new group is in place.
 - If key leaders from the mother church are going with the new work, give time and opportunity for these leaders to be replaced.
 - At the mother church, share a public announcement of the launch date, even though there may be some with mixed feelings about the new church plant.

- The mother church and other congregations should be given the opportunity to send persons to assist the new work for a period of time to help with key areas of ministry, if needed. It is understood that such individuals may return to their mother church at the end of this period.

F. On the launch Sunday:

- Acknowledge the support given by the mother church and surrounding congregations.
- If possible, representatives of the mother church and other congregations should be invited to be present in the first service of the new work.

G. Build for long-term relationships by:

- Exchanging plans and/or ideas as to how all groups involved may have a part in building positive and lasting relationships.
- Working toward having a larger majority of all the involved parties participating in the planting of a new church.

SECTION 7

MAINTENANCE OF CREDENTIALS AND CERTIFICATION FOR MINISTERS AND CONGREGATIONS

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SECTION 7

MAINTENANCE OF CREDENTIALS AND CERTIFICATION FOR MINISTERS AND CONGREGATIONS

7.1 Continuing the Credentialing of Ordained Ministers

7.1.1 Updating the Calling and Accountability of Ordained Ministers

An official update of the calling and accountability for each ordained minister in the Church of God should be undertaken regularly. There should be a determination as to whether the ministerial call and commitment of the ordained minister remain current. Appropriate currency is to be measured in part by participation and reporting expectations fulfilled, namely:

1. Every Assembly will require attendance of ministers at a particular percentage of annual state/region ministerial meetings.
2. Every Assembly should require a yearly registration of pastors and congregations to be approved by the state/regional assembly. If a minister fails to register with Church of God Ministries for two consecutive years, the minister will be notified by the appropriate assembly that credentials are being suspended for 6 (six) months. If there is no acceptable response at the end of this period, a certified letter of warning will be sent by the appropriate assembly. It should include the awareness of the potential loss of IRS status. If an acceptable response is not received within 30 (thirty) days, credentials will be revoked and the minister's name removed from the assembly's approved list. Reference to "IRS status" is to the legal and tax systems of the United States. This stance is also intended as appropriate within the Canadian legal and tax systems.
3. Ministers are to be informed of their responsibility to contact the appropriate state/regional assembly and register annually, and of the repercussions of not maintaining proper contact and registration. Additionally, ministers are required to notify the credentialing body of their transfer to another assembly within thirty (30) days of moving into the jurisdiction of that other assembly.

7.1.2 The Credentials Committee Should Ensure a Periodic Ministry Update

- A. Purpose:** The periodic ministry updating (minimum of every five years) is intended primarily to learn about, honor, support, and ensure the integrity of ministry, thus affirming the individual minister and undergirding the health and ongoing effectiveness of the mission of the church. Instead of being a time of performance review, the core purpose is to understand and affirm the minister's present sense of calling and commitment and its relation to the standards and expectations of the Church of God. This is an opportunity for ministry colleagues to listen, share, and support. The process is expected of all credentialed ministers and encouraged but not required of retired ministers. Retirees, however, should be contacted when possible so that there is awareness of any special needs requiring understanding and assistance.
- B. Areas to be Explored:**
1. The current call to Christian ministry and how it is being lived out;
 2. Nature and extent of connection with the ongoing life of the Church of God;
 3. A background (including criminal) check. Rather than arising from suspicion, this check fulfills legal requirements and provides protection for the minister and those being served.
- C. Follow-up:** Based on results of the above, affirmation, encouragement, and any needed assistance or guidance are to be offered to the minister and, if necessary, a plan developed to assist with any area of need or concern.
- D. Implications of Non-Participation**
Failure to participate in the update process brings the potential for the suspension or revocation of credentials.

7.2 The Right of Congregational Intervention

The Credentials Committee of an assembly may intervene in congregational life and/or pastoral vocation for purposes of consultation, counsel, and/or discipline when circumstances appear to warrant, especially when such intervention is requested in writing by a recognized authority of the congregation. Such authorities include:

- A.** Pastor or pastoral staff.
- B.** Governing board of the congregation.
- C.** A petitioned request as provided for in the congregational bylaws.

Additionally, the Credentials Committee may seek intervention at its own initiative when it becomes aware that a congregation and/or pastor substantially deviates from accepted practices or standards of the Church of God, or when the congregation or pastor is at risk and no intervention request is forthcoming. Strict congregational autonomy, when it functions without regard to consequences to the larger church, is not part of the teaching ideal of the Church of God. Credentials Committees will investigate and make recommendations to the congregational staff and leadership.

7.3 Provision for Clergy Confession and Accountability

The following guidelines are established to aid Credentials Committees in addressing circumstances where counseling of a minister who has self-initiated confessions of struggles with ongoing personal issues, temptations, and/or sin.

As required by mandated reporting laws, communication of ***such circumstances would include, but not be exclusive to the following: any indication of physical or sexual abuse, especially of minors, senior adults or at-risk people, any indication of physical harm personally or to another individual, and illegal behavior.

7.3.1 Redemptive Refuge

The Credentials Committee is encouraged to create a designated person or team, either as a formal part of the committee or in informal cooperation with it, that exists as a safe place for ministers to come and receive spiritual support and accountability related to struggles with ongoing personal issues, temptations, and/or sins. This person or team will honor James 5:16 and Galatians 6:2 by being a place for confession and repentance. They will walk supportively and in loving accountability with that minister to a place of healing and victory.

While each case may be different, it is preferable for this team to deal with ministers redemptively outside of the disciplinary track. However, in certain serious situations, it will be incumbent upon this person/team to report matters to governing authorities and the credentials committee for formal investigation and possible discipline both for the good of the individual minister as well as the congregation and people they lead and serve. Such circumstances would include, but not be exclusive to, the following:

any indication of physical or sexual abuse, any indication of physical harm to self or others, and any pattern of illegal behavior.

The identity of this person/team should be well known to the ministers in each respective assembly so that access to them is simple and easy. At the same time, their work with ministers should be understood to be strictly confidential whenever possible.

If a member(s) of this team has a vested interest (physical or marital relationship, close friend, staff member at the same congregation, or other financial, emotional or relational interest) in the person wishing to confess, this would be defined as a conflict of interest. Therefore, that person would remove themselves from that confessing or sharing relationship and the one confessing or sharing directed to another person or team member.

7.4 Discipline of Ministers

The following guidelines are established to aid Credentials Committees in addressing circumstances where the discipline of a minister is deemed necessary or required by mandatory reporting laws and the communication of such.

7.4.1 Circumstances Justifying Discipline

For the following circumstances or types of misconduct, a minister will be subject to counsel and/or discipline on the recommendation of the appropriate Credentials Committee:

1. Sexual misconduct, whether with the same or opposite sex. For the purposes of this *Manual*, sexual misconduct is defined as follows:

Sexual Misconduct. Sexual misconduct involves a wide range of behaviors including, but not limited to, any inappropriate touching; inappropriate hugging or kissing; sexual intercourse; making implicit or explicit suggestions of sexual activity; asking for sexual favors; or exposing the genital areas. Homosexual behavior, pedophilia, exhibitionism, voyeurism, and use of pornography of all kinds, whether in person or through electronic media, are considered sexual misconduct.

*Formal statements by the General Assembly of the Church of God on homosexuality are found in Barry L. Callen's book *Following the Light* (Warner Press, 2000), pages 249-250 and 260-261.*

Sexual Harassment. Harassment involves a wide range of behaviors including, but not limited to, sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other unwanted verbal or physical conduct of a sexual, provocative, or intimidating nature.

2. Failure to maintain biblical expectations of family relationships (see 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1). This is to include, but not be limited to, domestic violence against spouse or children as well as any other verbal, emotional or spiritual abuse.
3. Failure to live a lifestyle consistent with one's sex chromosomal identity. We believe the Scriptures teach that God has created us individually as male or female.
4. Disruptive behavioral patterns injurious to the internal unity of the congregation served, the Assembly where one ministers, and/or the Movement. Such behavior includes, but is not limited to, gossip, breaking of confidences, a pattern of causing conflict, racist language and behavior, sexist language and behavior, uncontrolled temper, and verbal and spiritual abuse.
5. Promoting or defending a teaching or practice contrary to the Word of God as commonly understood by the Church of God, and at times expressed historically by General Assembly resolutions. This may be by publicly teaching, giving verbal assent to, or endorsing in written form. This includes the performance of same-sex marriage ceremonies and the offering of church facilities for such ceremonies.
6. Mismanagement of congregational and/or personal finances so as to discredit the ministry of the church.
7. Unethical behavior, including criminal conduct or any conduct unbecoming to the professional ministry as referenced in the Ministerial Code of Ethics in section 2.1.2 B (e.g., misrepresentation, fraud, conflict of interest, using the church and its resources for personal gain, and betrayal of confidence).
8. Failure to report known misconduct of another minister to the appropriate Credentials Committee and, if necessary, to other appropriate authorities.
9. Failure to submit to recognized authority, whether that of the Holy Spirit, the duly elected leaders of the congregation, or the area assembly and its Credentials Committee.

10. Failure to respond to an invitation or directive to meet with the Credentials Committee with jurisdiction in the area of the minister's current service.
11. Demonstrated incompetence, lacking the qualities, skills, and/or character to perform the tasks of Christian ministry.
12. Failure to maintain supporting ties with the Church of God whenever possible on a local level, as well as with state, district, provincial, or national assemblies. Supporting ties include, but are not limited to, attendance at regular meetings and fellowship, and leading the congregation in financial support of the budget and/or mission.
13. Failure to maintain registration with the relevant state or regional assembly and Church of God Ministries.
14. Failure to be engaged in Vocational ministry (does not apply to retirees or the disabled). Vocational ministry is defined as any ministry service formally acknowledged by the local church and officially recognized by the appropriate credentialing assembly, whether full-time, part-time, compensated, or simply recognized because of regular performance of the standard sacerdotal duties of a minister. For additional defining of "vocational ministry," see item 21 on page 11 and sections 1.4.1, 2.1.6, and 2.2.1—2.2.4.

7.4.2 Handling an Allegation of Ministerial Misconduct

When aware that any of the above (section 7.4.1) or equally serious conditions may exist, the Credentials Committee must conduct an initial review of the facts in the case. The initial review can only begin when written documentation of concern is presented. This may lead to a further and more extensive investigation, determination, notification, and keeping of reports and other records.

All reports of clergy misconduct will be diligently investigated by the Credentials Committee and/or its appointed representatives. The entire process will be documented in writing. Ascertaining the truth in such cases may require the assistance of outside professionals to investigate allegations and recommend appropriate resolutions.

- A. When becoming aware of a possible clergy misconduct, the Credentials Committee shall:
 - 1. As a first step in this review, if there is a reporting party, ask the person(s) to write and sign a detailed statement of the allegation. If there is no Reporting party, document the source and nature of the committee's awareness of the possible failure and proceed as follows.
 - 2. Notify the minister involved in the allegation.
 - 3. Conduct a preliminary review to determine whether a thorough investigation appears justified.
 - 4. If an investigation appears justified, then an Investigative Committee is established.
 - 5. Expediently create a timeline for the investigation.
- B. Mandatory Reporting. Any concern that speaks to abuse of vulnerable populations (children, elderly, or differently abled adults) or any other criminal activity will be reported to the proper authorities as required by local law.
- C. If the allegation appears to warrant, the Credentials Committee will then appoint an Investigative Committee, which shall work under the direction of the Credentials Committee. This committee must be comprised of members who have no family, friendship, or business ties to the Reporting Party or the Subject of the concern -- objectivity is crucial for a credible investigative process. Any concern received that speaks of child abuse or other criminal activity warrants careful review, regardless of the timing of the alleged clergy misconduct, and may require reporting to proper authorities.
- D. The continuation of the investigation and subsequent conclusions and actions are the responsibility of the Credentials Committee, based in large part, but not entirely, on the results of the work of the Investigative Committee.
- E. Once it is determined that a formal investigation is warranted, all documents associated with the allegation and investigation are to become part of the minister's professional file.
- F. The following are the guiding principles for the Credentials Committee to follow in the investigative process:
 - 1. All parties will be treated respectfully with care and dignity.
 - 2. Each charge will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated.

3. In the case of sexual behavior, the requirements of local law will be complied with immediately. The confidentiality of the person(s) making the allegation will be maintained, as requested and appropriate. Permission to share the identity of the reporting party with any person or committee must be obtained in writing from the individual initiating the allegation. The reporting party's name should be included in written records only as necessary to the investigative process and to document charges. Such records must be safeguarded and kept confidential by the credentialing and investigative committees. However, a primary concern will be for the welfare of an apparent victim(s) and protection of other potential victims. This concern, however, is always to be balanced with the legitimate needs and rights of the accused minister.

It is vital that, in the investigative process, the Credentials Committee deal carefully with and focus on the facts as they become known. The Credentials Committee will hold as primary objectives: (a) the redemption and restoration of all parties involved; (b) the integrity of the ministry; and (c) the well-being of the minister's congregation, family, and any other affected parties.

7.4.3 The Investigative Committee

All allegations received by the Chair of a Credentials Committee that would constitute ministerial misconduct will be investigated by a committee appointed by the Chair. The Chair shall provide the allegation and any supporting materials received from the reporting party to the Investigative Committee for its consideration.

A. Composition of Investigative Committee.

1. The Investigative Committee should be comprised of between 3 (three) and 7 (seven) persons, with a majority of those persons being ordained clergy in good standing with the Church of God, Anderson, IN. If necessary, the Investigative Committee may be an extension of the Credentials Committee.
2. Each of the members of the Investigative Committee must be free of any conflict of interest with the person(s) making the allegation, the Reporting Party or the minister involved. This includes familial ties, close friendships or other connections with those persons, attending the same congregation or serve on the same pastoral staff. Should existing relationships within the assembly prevent the formation of an

Investigative Committee with no conflict of interest, the Credentials Committee may invite ordained clergy in the Church of God to serve in this capacity.

3. If a given State, Region, or Province does not have sufficient ordained clergy to comprise an Investigative Committee, ordained clergy in good standing with the Church of God in other states, regions, etc., may be appointed to serve on the Investigative Committee.
4. To conduct a thorough investigation, it may be necessary for the Investigative Committee to obtain the assistance of other professionals in the examination of the allegations. Therefore, it may be prudent to call upon or appoint lay professionals, such as legal counsel, private investigators, psychologists, licensed or certified counselors, etc., or other persons of related professions to provide services related to the investigation.
5. In any other processes of the investigation and/or investigative team, standard conflict of interest rules apply. See Section 1.1.2 G.

B. Scope of Investigation & Access to Information.

During the investigation, both the reporting party and the Minister named in the complaint should be allowed to provide relevant information to the Investigative Committee. This would include documents, electronically stored information, interviews of the Reporting Party and the Minister or person involved, interviews of other parties involved or identified through the investigative process, witness statements, affidavits, psychological evaluations or tests, etc. The Reporting Party and Minister named in the complaint should be permitted to submit any information to the Investigative Committee that is factually relevant to the allegations in the complaint. The Investigative Committee should consider all the information, investigate the allegations, and rely on the evidence that is relevant and reliable.

C. Additional Guidelines for Investigative Process. The following are some additional guiding principles for the Investigative Committee to follow during the investigative process:

1. The Reporting Party and the Minister named in the complaint must be treated equally with care, respect, and dignity throughout the investigative process.
2. Each allegation of ministerial misconduct in the complaint must be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated.
3. The minister under examination may bring a spouse or individual to act in a supportive capacity. This person is there for support purposes only and does not have a voice in any proceedings.

4. If the allegations lead to a mandated reporting scenario, and a criminal investigation is initiated by law enforcement or legal authorities, the Investigative Committee should pause its review until the official criminal investigation is complete. The Credentials Committee should temporarily suspend the credentials of the minister involved until any criminal proceedings are complete. This suspension does not assume guilt of the minister concerned; this is done to protect the reporting party, other individuals involved, and the minister concerned.
5. Depending on the nature of the allegations, both the Chair of the Credentials Committee (upon receipt of the Complaint) and the Investigative Committee must be mindful of potentially applicable federal, state, or local law and of the possibility of mandatory reporting requirements to police authorities for certain crimes. If doubt or concern arises, the Chair of the Credentials Committee and/or the Investigative Committee members are encouraged to consult with local legal counsel to determine if any mandatory reporting requirements have been triggered by the allegations of ministerial misconduct in the Complaint, and if so, to comply immediately. If police authorities initiate a criminal investigation, the Investigative Committee should consider whether it is best to stay its investigation of the allegations until the criminal investigation and any resulting legal proceeding are complete so as not to interfere with the criminal investigation. In most instances, if a criminal investigation is initiated by the police authorities, it is best for the Investigative Committee to refrain from conducting its full investigation until the criminal proceedings are complete.
6. The Investigative Committee should aim to complete its investigation and issue a report with recommendations to the Credentials Committee within 120 days after the Investigative Committee is convened by the Chair of the Credentials Committee.

7.4.4 Investigative Committee Credible Basis for Action, Report, and Call to Credentials Committee Action.

When charges of clergy misconduct have been substantiated, it is the responsibility of the Credentials Committee to determine the status of the minister's credentials and to prescribe a process for the discipline and rehabilitation of the minister that provides for the well-being of the minister's spouse and family, church members, and/or clients. This process should also address directly the needed healing of the minister, the

minister's family, and the congregation. Further, if the discipline and rehabilitation of the minister create the need for temporary leadership in the affected congregation, in that case, the committee should stand ready to help the congregation identify ministerial supply.

While the committee recognizes its jurisdiction is solely with the minister and congregation, the committee will be sensitive to the needs and concerns of any victim(s) impacted by the minister's misconduct.

- A. Credible basis for action:** After the investigation is complete, the Investigative Committee members should determine whether a preponderance of the evidence supports each allegation. To satisfy a credible basis for action, the evidence must show that an allegation of ministerial misconduct was more likely than not to have occurred. Essentially, the evidence must weigh in favor of the allegation for that standard to be met.
- B. Investigative Committee Report.** Once the Investigative Committee completes its work, the Committee will prepare a report detailing its findings and forward this report to the Credentials Committee Chair within 14 days. Such a report should detail whether there is a finding of ministerial misconduct, a finding of inappropriate conduct (not reaching the level of ministerial misconduct, but the behavior was unwise or improper), or a finding of appropriate conduct (there was not a preponderance of evidence that the allegations were accurate).
- C. Call to Credentials Committee Action.** Within thirty (30) days of receiving the Investigative Committee Report, either the person who raised the concern or the minister identified in the allegation may request that the Credentials Committee hold a formal review to consider the concerns raised. This request must be submitted in writing, signed and dated, and sent to the Chair of the Credentials Committee. It should include a clear summary of the specific issues or concerns to be addressed.

If the Chair receives a timely written request for a formal review, the Chair will schedule a meeting of the Credentials Committee to consider the matters outlined.

In addition, the Chair may choose—within thirty (30) days of receiving the Investigative Committee Report—to convene a formal review meeting even if no request has been made by either party, if it is deemed necessary for a full and fair consideration of the concern.

If no formal review is requested by either party within thirty (30) days, and the Chair does not independently call for one within thirty (30) days, the Credentials Committee will proceed to a final decision based on the written report and supporting information provided by the Investigative Committee.

7.4.5 Formal Meeting of the Credentials Committee concerning a Report of Ministerial Misconduct.

A. Composition of the Credentials Committee that will hear the Complaint.

When a formal meeting is needed regarding a report of ministerial misconduct, a Credentials Committee will prayerfully assemble to serve as a body of spiritual discernment, accountability, and determination.

The Chair of the Credentials Committee will lead the meeting. Every member of the committee must be free from personal relationships or prior involvement with the situation or individuals involved to ensure fairness and impartiality. This includes familial ties, close friendships, or other connections with those persons, attending the same congregation, or serving on the same pastoral staff. If conflicts of interest render the Credentials Committee unable to find enough available ordained ministers to serve, the Chair may invite ordained ministers in good standing from other Church of God jurisdictions to serve. It is preferable that individuals who participated in the earlier investigative process not serve on the Credentials Committee for the formal meeting, other than the Chair.

The Chair may retain legal counsel to advise the committee, but this counsel may only offer guidance and may not speak on behalf of the committee or vote in its decisions. If it seems necessary to involve legal counsel to advise the committee, the Chair may bring a recommendation to the regional pastor or appropriate authorizing body of the assembly. If legal counsel is acquired, this individual may only offer guidance and may not speak on behalf of the committee or vote in its decisions.

B. Scheduling the Formal Meeting.

Unless circumstances require otherwise, this meeting should be scheduled within 60 days after the Chair receives the formal complaint of ministerial misconduct or initiates the meeting independently.

The Chair will determine the date, time, and location of the formal meeting in consultation with both parties and will give at least 21 days written notice to allow for proper preparation.

While both parties will be invited and encouraged to participate fully, the meeting may proceed in their absence, unless the charge has been withdrawn,

the implicated minister has confessed and surrendered credentials, or the Chair determines the meeting should be rescheduled for a valid reason.

C. Privacy of the Formal Meeting.

These meetings are not open to the public. Participation is limited to the Credentials Committee, those assisting them, the parties involved, including a support individual and designated person(s) bringing evidence. Those with relevant evidence will wait outside the meeting room until being invited to speak. The Committee will deliberate in private at the end of the meeting.

D. Support Individuals

Each party may be accompanied by an individual of their choosing for support. Each party may also have one assistant counsel (such as a licensed attorney) who may advise them during the meeting. None of these support individuals will be permitted to speak on behalf of either party. All individuals must be approved by the Committee prior to the meeting.

E. Persons Bringing Evidence.

It is the responsibility of each party to identify and secure individuals who will bring evidence on their behalf; these persons may come from inside or outside the Church of God. The Committee may also invite additional people to bring evidence. A complete list of names must be shared with the Committee 14 days before the meeting. In turn, the Chair will provide both parties with a complete list of evidentiary names 7 days prior to the meeting.

If someone on the forementioned list is unable to attend in person, the Chair may arrange for alternative testimony (e.g., video-recorded statements, written statements) with proper notice.

F. Recording the Meeting.

An accurate record of the meeting must be kept, including exhibits and the final report. The method of recording will be determined by the Credentials Committee. It is recommended to use a professional transcription service to ensure accuracy.

G. Use of Evidence.

The Credentials Committee is not bound by civil rules of evidence, but will receive and consider information that is relevant, trustworthy, and fair.

H. Order of Formal Meeting Regarding a Report of Ministerial Misconduct

Any formal meeting regarding a report of ministerial misconduct should proceed in the following order, noted below. The Credentials Chairperson may determine the length of the meeting and call for a pause whenever necessary.

During any pause, members of the Credentials Committee and the individuals involved (including individuals present for support or those bringing evidence or other information) should not discuss the nature or the contents of this meeting with one another.

1. Initial Acknowledgments. At the beginning of the meeting, the Chairperson will lead in prayer, inviting the Lord to guide the hearts and minds of those present. The Chair will remind each person to speak truthfully and honorably. Then the Chairperson will read the concerns identified in the formal complaint of misconduct. The minister named in this concern will be asked to respond to the truth of these allegations. If the minister accepts responsibility, the Committee may determine to conclude the meeting, or they may choose to receive additional information to help determine next steps. If the minister does not accept responsibility or chooses not to respond, the meeting will continue, and it will be assumed the formal complaint is being contested.

2. Opening Comments. Both the person bringing the complaint and the minister implicated by the complaint may briefly present their positions to the committee. In the absence of a representative bringing the allegation, the Chairperson will acknowledge the initial complaint and then invite the minister to give a brief explanation.

3. Sharing of Information. Each side will have an opportunity to share information and present factual evidence to help the Credentials Committee understand the situation. The person who raised the formal complaint will go first, followed by the minister responding to the concern. In some situations, the one raising an allegation may not be present. In this case, the Credentials Committee will first address the formal complaint, taking into account any evidence or information provided by the Investigative Committee. The minister implicated will then be allowed to share.

The presentation of information may include contacting individuals who may bring evidence, submitting documents, or presenting other relevant material. Both the one issuing the formal complaint and the minister implicated in the complaint may ask questions of any party speaking in the formal meeting. Additionally, the Credentials Committee may also ask questions of anyone present to gain additional clarity.

4. Final Comments. Once all information has been presented, both sides will have a final opportunity to share any remaining thoughts, summarizing their positions on the formal complaint. This can be done through a short statement at the conclusion of the meeting.

I. Credentials Committee Review and Decisions.

After the formal meeting regarding a report of ministerial misconduct concludes, the Credentials Committee will convene privately to review all information shared and determine whether ministerial misconduct occurred and appropriate next steps.

1. Standard of Proof. After the meeting is complete, the Credentials 1. Committee shall determine with respect to each allegation of ministerial misconduct in the Complaint whether clearly convincing evidence supports the conclusion that the allegation is true. To satisfy this standard of proof, the evidence must prove that an allegation of ministerial misconduct is substantially more likely than not to be true. Some characterize this higher standard of proof as requiring that at least 75% of the evidence must weigh in favor of the allegation for the standard to be met. An affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the Credentials Committee members with respect to each allegation of misconduct is necessary to conclude that clearly convincing evidence supports the allegation. The burden of proof rests with the Person(s) making the allegation. The Minister named in the complaint is presumed innocent of the claims of misconduct unless and until the Credentials Committee reaches findings deciding otherwise.

2. Findings of the Credentials Committee. The Credentials Committee may reach one of the following findings with respect to each allegation of ministerial misconduct in the Complaint:

A. Finding of Ministerial Misconduct. After deliberations, if five of the seven members of the Credentials Committee vote affirmatively to conclude that one or more of the allegations of ministerial misconduct (section 7.4.1) in the Complaint are supported by clearly convincing evidence, then the Credentials Committee shall make a written finding of ministerial misconduct with respect to the allegation(s) under consideration. The committee should then discuss final sanctions for the minister implicated in the concern.

B. No Finding of Inappropriate Conduct or Misconduct. After deliberations, if two-thirds (2/3) of the members of the Credentials Committee conclude that clearly convincing evidence has not

been offered to prove the allegations of ministerial misconduct or to prove inappropriate conduct, then the Credentials Committee shall make such a written report. Then the Committee should communicate the final finding to both parties.

7.4.6 Final Determination After Formal Meeting on Allegation of Ministerial Misconduct

Following the Formal Meeting, the Credentials Committee should deliberate to reach an agreement regarding an appropriate final determination. The Credentials Committee's deliberations regarding final determination should be guided by the following primary objectives: (a) the redemption and restoration of all parties involved; (b) the integrity of the ministry; and (c) the well-being of the minister's congregation, family, and any other affected parties. Given the significance of the final decision, it is highly recommended that the Credentials Committee seek unanimity in its decision-making regarding actions taken. However, the Credentials Committee members must have a 75% vote in making a final determination.

A. Ministerial Misconduct Disposition.

After the Formal Meeting, if a Credentials Committee reaches a finding of ministerial misconduct, then it may issue to the minister named in the complaint any of the following sanctions, as it deems appropriate:

1. Warning. The Credentials Committee can issue an official warning to the minister stating that the minister's behavior constituted misconduct under section 7.4.1 of the Credentials Manual. The Committee should suggest a program of rehabilitative and remedial action that includes a change in behavior. A copy of the Warning must be sent to the appropriate representative of Church of God Ministries.

2. Censure. The Credentials Committee can issue an official censure to the minister stating that the minister's behavior constituted misconduct under section 7.4.1 of the Credentials Manual. A Censure indicates further or similar conduct is unacceptable and could lead to suspension or termination of the minister's authorization for ministry. Censure must be accompanied by a program for required rehabilitative and remedial action, such as counseling and supervision for a specified period. The minister must be informed that failure to comply with the prescribed program will result in suspension or termination of the minister's authorization to perform ministry. A copy of the Censure must be sent to the appropriate representative of Church of God Ministries.

3. Suspension of Standing. The Credentials committee can issue an official suspension to the minister stating that the minister's behavior constituted misconduct under section 7.4.1 of the Credentials Manual. A suspension rescinds the minister's privilege of authorization to minister in the Church of God for a specified period of time. Although this does not permanently remove the ministerial authorization, during suspension, the minister cannot perform the functions of professional ministry. The suspension should state clearly the period of time it is in effect and specify the conditions under which it is in effect. The purpose of a suspension is to underscore the seriousness of the minister's misconduct and to provide an opportunity for a program of rehabilitation as prescribed by the Credentials Committee. The minister must be informed that failure of the minister to comply with the prescribed program successfully will result in the revocation of credentials for ministry. A copy of the Suspension must be sent to the appropriate representative of Church of God Ministries.

4. Revocation of Credentials. If the Credentials Committee finds that the minister's misconduct is sufficiently egregious, it will inform the minister that it is revoking the minister's credentials for ministry. This revocation permanently terminates the minister's authorization to minister in the Church of God. The revocation should clearly state the reasoning behind the decision. A copy of the Revocation must be sent to the appropriate representative of Church of God Ministries.

5. Voluntary Termination. During any phase of the process, if the minister implicated in the complaint voluntarily surrenders their credentials to the Credentials Committee, the Committee should accept the minister's credentials. It is recommended that the Committee still complete an investigation and prepare an Investigative Committee Report summarizing the findings of the investigation, which will be stored in the minister's file, along with all evidence obtained during the investigation. A copy of the Complaint and the Investigative Committee Report, indicating the voluntary surrender of credentials, must be sent to the appropriate representative of Church of God Ministries.

7.4.7 Report of Findings & Disposition

After the Credentials Committee reaches a decision, the Committee will prepare a written report detailing the findings of the Committee with respect to the allegations.

The Committee should strive to issue its written report within thirty (30) days of the Formal Meeting. The Chair will provide a copy of this report via certified mail or a

functional equivalent to the person issuing the complaint and the minister implicated. Whatever form of communication is issued should come with evidence of receipt of the report. Proof of receipt should be stored in the minister's file.

The Committee must include in the report information about the right to appeal the decision.

Church of God Ministries should be notified of any warning, censure, suspension or revocation, or any voluntary surrender of credentials. This information should also be communicated to the State Assemblies and the Regional Pastors group.

After the formal meeting, if the Credentials Committee determines that no misconduct or inappropriate conduct has occurred or that no disciplinary measures are required based on the evidence, the Credentials Committee shall make a written finding with respect to the allegations of ministerial misconduct and consider other appropriate action as necessary.

7.4.7 Right to Appeal Credentials Committee's Findings & Disposition

Within thirty (30) forty-five (45) days after the parties receive the Credentials Committee's Report of Determination, if a party believes that the Credentials Committee has procedurally erred by not complying with the applicable hearing procedures outlined in the Credentials Manual, then the party may send a written notice of appeal, via certified mail or functional equivalent, to the Chair of the Committee on Credentials of the General Assembly of the Church of God ("COC") and to the Chair of the Credentials Committee that issued the Report of Determination. The notice of appeal must be signed and dated by the concerned party, and it must specify the procedural errors of the Credentials Committee that are being appealed.

Once the Chair of the COC receives a timely notice of appeal from a party, the Chair will contact the parties, arrange a schedule for the submission of briefs by the parties, and, to consider the appeal, convene the COC membership or some ad hoc committee of its membership judged by the officers to be appropriate for the circumstance in question. The COC may hear the appeal on the written submissions of the parties, or it may hear oral argument from the parties or their counsel, at the discretion of the COC. The Credentials Committee from which the matter is being appealed will cooperate with the COC and provide all or any portions of the Formal Meeting that the COC may request to consider the appeal.

It is important to note that if a party does not appeal to the COC within thirty (30) to forty-five (45) days of receiving the Report of Determination, the party forfeits any right to appeal to the COC. Furthermore, the COC will not consider appeals related to the substantive findings of a Credentials Committee or decisions about determinations. The scope of the COC's review is limited to whether a Credentials Committee has followed the procedures outlined in the Credentials Manual. Therefore, if the COC finds that a Credentials Committee has followed these procedures, the Committee's determination will be affirmed. If the COC finds that a Credentials Committee has not followed the procedures, the case will be sent back to the Credentials Committee for further proceedings. After reaching a decision on an appeal, the COC will issue a written ruling to all parties.

7.5 Restoration of Ministers

The suspension, termination, or voluntary surrendering of ministerial credentials may not be final in every case. It is understood, however, that there may be certain failures of behavior and/or character that preclude partial or full restoration to leadership in vocational Christian ministry. It also is understood that there are important distinctions to be made between restoring to faith, restoring to fellowship, and restoring to leadership.

Genuine repentance of sin restores the one repenting to the joy of faith and the benefits of the grace of God. In this sense, restoration to faith is restoration to Christ. When relationships are healed and community renewed, then restoration to fellowship can be attained. In this sense, restoration to fellowship is restoration to function within the Body of Christ. Restoration to faith and fellowship, however, is not a guarantee of restoration to leadership. While the Credentials Committee may grant restoration to leadership, only a congregation may issue the actual call to leadership.

7.5.1 Responsibilities of the Credentials Committee in Determining If Restoration Is Possible, and If So, the Process and Timeline to Be Followed

The roles of a Credentials Committee include working with an attitude of encouraging and, when necessary, restoring. The Credentials Committee shall have the responsibility of determining whether or not the restoration of a fallen minister to leadership is possible. If the committee determines that restoration to leadership may be possible, it shall establish a length of supervised accountability of not less than two (2) years. Based on the type and severity of the failure, the Credentials Committee may determine that three or more years of supervised accountability are necessary to assure attainment of adequate healing and recovery. In every case, the Credentials Committee has the responsibility of determining the process and steps of the restoration of ministerial credentials. The usual steps are as follows.

A. Confession.

Sin is rarely a victimless act. Often the life of the local congregation and that of the church at large are damaged. A primary step in the restoration process is acknowledging the transgression. Because the very act of confession could itself extend the problem, careful steps must be taken to confess the wrong with discretion and sensitivity, and only in an appropriate setting. One manifestation of genuine confession is found in the attitude of the one confessing. It should be marked by several distinguishing characteristics:

1. Acknowledging the sin in a spontaneous manner;
2. Confessing the sin in a repentant manner;
3. Accepting responsibility for one's actions;
4. Declining to shift blame to other parties; and
5. Placing no conditions on the outcome of the confession.

The confession may be offered originally in a private manner to a trusted colleague or appropriate other person, a person who possesses the gifts of wisdom and compassion. Restoration to leadership, however, may require a more formal and perhaps even public confession. Although public confession is sometimes essential, not every public setting is appropriate for detailed confession. The Credentials Committee or supervising minister should offer guidance in this matter.

B. Repentance.

Confession is virtually meaningless without repentance. Because of the public life of the ordained minister, both the confession and expressions of repentance should address those individuals, families, congregations, and/or communities damaged by the sin. Beyond the spoken words, legitimate and authentic repentance ultimately will issue in overt and obvious changes in attitudes and behavior. Despite God's grace, restoration is a costly process.

C. Forgiveness.

According to the biblical principle regarding genuine confession and repentance, it is incumbent on those wronged to forgive and be open to renewed fellowship. Failure to do so would be contrary to biblical teaching, thus turning the offender into the offended.

D. Restitution.

Restoration may include acts of restitution as may be required by the Credentials Committee, including public confession and repayment if and when it is deemed appropriate.

E. Cleansing.

While it is said that “time heals all wounds,” in many instances time can best provide healing only if counseling and other therapeutic processes are applied. Professional counseling may be prescribed as a condition for restoration. In this instance, the recovering minister will be required to withdraw from positions of leadership throughout the recovery period. The offending minister will be accountable to a supervising minister assigned by the Credentials Committee, and may be directed to worship in a setting other than the one where the wrong was committed. The supervising minister will report periodically to the Credentials Committee.

F. Reinstatement.

If and when the minister meets all of the above conditions and desires reinstatement, that minister shall submit a written request to the Credentials Committee.

7.5.2 Restoration of Credentials

The process of considering reinstatement of ministerial credentials shall be as follows:

1. Process the minister’s application;
2. Commend the minister to the assembly and to such other persons and groups as may have been offended by the minister’s prior conduct, working toward both restoration of the minister’s credentials and full fellowship and service;
3. Record in the assembly’s professional file on the minister all minutes of actions taken toward reinstatement, and inform Church of God Ministries of such action;
4. Maintain a supportive attitude toward the minister’s future ministry.

When a Credentials Committee believes that an offending minister should be restored to full leadership, it shall report its findings to the appropriate board or committee for its approval and ratification. Reinstatement shall not be complete without this process. Restoration will be contingent on these actions:

1. Full cooperation with and accountability to the supervising minister throughout the restoration process;

2. A favorable report and positive recommendation from the supervising minister;
3. Demonstrated Christian fidelity and commitment, including active participation in a local congregation. The recovering minister must give strong evidence that the cause of the failure has been corrected;
4. Recanting of any spurious beliefs or other disruptive stances that may have contributed to the disciplinary action;
5. Submission to all procedures and requirements that are routine to the credentialing of ministers under normal circumstances;
6. Full compliance with the terms of restoration.

7.5.3 Agents Involved in the Restoration Process

Restoring fallen leadership within the church involves a network of concerned persons, including the fallen leader and the Credentials Committee, and potentially others. The process inevitably requires the close attention of a carefully chosen person who will act as an agent of the Holy Spirit, the Credentials Committee, and the church in guiding the fallen leader through the process of restoration, concluding, it is hoped, with full reinstatement. This supervising minister shall be appointed by and be accountable to the Credentials Committee. The supervising minister should possess these character traits and leadership qualities:

1. Unusual wisdom and compassion;
2. The respect of the Credentials Committee;
3. Trusted by and available to the fallen leader;
4. Capable of lovingly confronting;
5. Keeps confidences;
6. Communicates clearly in written and oral fashion;
7. Cooperates fully with the instructions of the Credentials Committee.

A written covenant of accountability will be established between the supervising minister and the recovering leader. It will include at least these elements:

1. That the recovering leader should be in frequent contact with the supervising minister and be available as often as required;

2. That the supervising minister will report to and be accountable to the Credentials Committee; and
3. That the recovering leader will be expected to follow the directions of the supervising minister.

In the event that a restored leader relocates to the jurisdiction of another assembly, the Credentials Committee with original jurisdiction assumes the responsibility of forwarding to the Credentials Committee of the new assembly all pertinent information, including the status of credentials and a history of the restoration process. In the case of a fallen leader whose credentials have been suspended or revoked, whether or not that minister is in a restoration process, jurisdiction (and the minister's professional file) remains in the assembly where the discipline occurred, although a report of the suspension or revocation will be forwarded to the Credentials Committee of any assembly to which the minister attempts to transfer.

7.6 Counseling and Disciplining Congregations

Congregations may depart from norms that characterize a healthy, viable Church of God congregation (see section 6.1.1). Each congregation within the Church of God has a responsibility to be accountable to the others. Any congregation may be subject to counsel and/or discipline when: (1) its spiritual life, shared witness, or theological teachings are contrary to those central to the Church of God Teaching Tradition; (2) its internal relationships, whether among its members or with its pastor(s), are disruptive; or (3) its cooperation with and accountability to sister Church of God congregations is grossly lacking.

7.6.1 Responsibilities of the Credentials Committee in the Counseling and Disciplining of Congregations

When aware that a congregation within the assembly's jurisdiction deviates substantially from accepted standards (see section 6.1.1), the Credentials Committee, or its duly appointed representatives, may seek consultation with the pastor(s) and/or lay leaders of the congregation involved in the issue. Such consultation may come to involve an investigative process conducted by the Credentials Committee or its official representatives.

7.6.2 The Notification and Investigative Process

The Credentials Committee or its duly appointed representatives shall follow this procedure:

1. Inform the pastor and other involved persons of the concerns that have come to the Credentials Committee's attention. Preferably, this should be done in person, with at least two members of the committee in attendance. Concerns shall be put in writing.

2. Seek a full explanation from the minister and/or other leaders, listening nonjudgmentally, but perceptively.
3. Make such investigation and arrange for such consultations as are germane to the Credentials Committee's work.
4. Put the conclusions derived from the investigation, including all findings, recommendations, and actions taken, in writing, and place such writing in the assembly's file on this congregation. A written record of any such action should also be forwarded immediately to Church of God Ministries.

7.6.3 Offering Counsel, Facilitating Change, and Warning

As the case may warrant, the Credentials Committee may do one or more of the following:

A. Provide counsel and/or other services as may be welcomed or can be encouraged. Where there is conflict between the pastor and members of the congregation, or between factions within the congregation, the Credentials Committee should advocate the services of an intervention team, consisting of at least two persons well versed in proven conflict resolution methods.

B. Negotiate and assist in facilitating such changes as are agreed on, always doing so in a spirit of caring and unity.

Should all efforts at tasks A and B above prove ineffective, the Credentials Committee may issue a warning of disciplinary action. Types of warning may include these:

1. Provisional status without removal from listing in the *Yearbook* of the Church of God;
2. Provisional status with removal from the *Yearbook* of the Church of God;
3. Loss of certification and participation in the tax-exempt status maintained by Church of God Ministries. Note: Reference to "tax-exempt status" is to the legal and tax systems of the United States. This stance is also intended as appropriate within the Canadian legal and tax systems.

Should all warnings be ignored, the Credentials Committee will place the congregation on provisional status. Provisional status is to be interpreted as

an expression of interest, redemptive concern, and temporary relationship to a congregation in stress. It is an action of the Credentials Committee on behalf of the church at large. It is an extreme measure intended to gain the attention and cooperation of the stressed congregation.

7.6.4 Requirements for Imposing Provisional Status or Terminating Congregational Certification

The Credentials Committee should substantiate just cause and secure formal concurrence of the assembly to which it is answerable before acting to withdraw the formal certification of a congregation.

Action instituted by the Credentials Committee should be presented to the appropriate governing body of the assembly. The action must be sustained by a vote as prescribed in the assembly's bylaws (ideally a 75% minimum vote). Minutes of all actions taken by the Credentials Committee and subsequent actions taken by the appropriate governing body must be properly recorded and preserved in the assembly's permanent files.

Every congregation placed on provisional status or whose certification is terminated shall be permitted an appeal. That appeal must be filed and processed under guidelines established for the benefit of both ministers and congregations.

If a congregation becomes disaffiliated with the Church of God, the Credentials Committee, in cooperation with the appropriate assembly's executive officers, shall seek a legal and equitable financial settlement when facilities or other assets are contested.

7.6.5 Sanctions

Should all other means of reconciliation become exhausted, including a reasonable period of provisional status, it may be necessary to impose termination of a congregation's certification. In such a case, Church of God Ministries shall be notified, which in turn will notify the Internal Revenue Service for the removal of the congregation's participation in the tax-exempt status maintained by Church of God Ministries.

7.6.6 Terms for Lifting Provisional Status

Terms for lifting the provisional status of a congregation should be set forth clearly in writing, along with the provision for periodic review and, if advisable, established timelines. Rationale for both provisional status and termination of congregational certification should be carefully documented, with written copies going to the minister,

the congregation's corporate officers, the assembly office, Church of God Ministries and, where required by law, to proper authorities outside the church.

7.6.7 Responsibilities of the Credentials Committee When Dealing with Disruptive Laypersons

At times, congregations experience tension caused by laypersons holding attitudes/beliefs or engaging in behavioral patterns that disrupt the congregation's internal unity. Such behavior may be demonstrated by a lack of submission to established authority, whether that of the Holy Spirit, the duly elected leaders of the congregation, or the pastor. In such circumstances, the appropriate Credentials Committee may choose to offer its assistance and counsel. Preferably, the Credentials Committee will respond to an invitation for assistance from congregational members, responsible representatives of the congregation's governing structure, or the pastor, in accordance with the congregation's bylaws. In rare instances, intervention may be judged necessary without the receipt of a formal invitation.

7.7 Policy Regarding the Right of Appeal for Congregations to an Assembly's Governing Board

Congregations receiving discipline from a Credentials Committee have the right to appeal the decision of the committee.

7.7.1 The Appeal Process

The appeal process shall be as follows.

A. A written appeal by the congregation must be directed to the governing board of the assembly within forty-five (45) days of the contested decision, including a statement of the injustice as perceived by the one submitting the appeal.

The appeal must also include the basis for the appeal, e.g., new evidence, evidence of a conflict of interest, etc.

B. The governing board of the assembly shall explore all available documents and materials relative to the situation in an effort to determine if the appeal appears to have potential merit.

C. If after review the governing board determines that an appeal is warranted, then an appeal committee of not fewer than three persons in good standing, and not serving on a Credentials Committee, will be named by the governing board, with one to be named as chair. Every precaution should be exercised to obtain a committee of impartial persons known for their wisdom and sound Christian judgment.

D. Where necessary (e. g., in small assemblies and cases involving conflict of interest), persons from other Church of God assemblies may be utilized. In certain circumstances, it may be necessary for the act of restoration to be transferred to a jurisdiction other than the one in which the termination of credentials occurred, with the full support of the sending and receiving jurisdictions and a transfer of all relevant materials.

E. The appeal committee will review the evidence that has been previously examined by the Credentials Committee involved in the case. Former actions will be reviewed in the light of any new evidence introduced. The chair and one member of the Credentials Committee, someone who was present when the action in question was taken, will be requested to be present.

F. It shall be the responsibility of the appeal committee to set the time and place of the meeting. The expenses of such a meeting should be assumed by the assembly.

G. A written notification of the appeal committee's decision regarding the appeal will be shared in writing with all persons concerned, and copies of such action kept on file.

7.7.2 If a Grievance Continues to Be Unresolved

If a grievance continues to be unresolved following the work of an appeal committee, as a last resort the person filing the grievance can seek one of two remaining options.

A. Formally request the assembly's governing board to present the unresolved issue to the assembly for resolution. A special meeting of the assembly shall be announced and the purpose of the meeting stated in accordance to the assembly's bylaws requirement for special meetings. A majority vote of the eligible voters in attendance at the special meeting shall be required to resolve the issue in question.

- B.** When the Credentials Committee of an assembly lacks the organization, procedures, and/or persons necessary to make the implementation of an appeal process both objective and efficient, the following is suggested as an alternative procedure. It centers in the appointment of a regional appeals group.
1. A formal request seeking assistance should be directed to the Committee on Credentials;
 2. The Committee on Credentials will present to the parties in conflict the names of several responsible ministers in their geographic area; these are ministers who, if mutually agreed on, could be invited to meet with the conflicting parties;
 3. Financial arrangements for travel and hospitality shall be negotiated so that expenses may be shared equitably by the appealing party, the assembly, and Church of God Ministries;
 4. Commitment should be made in advance by both parties in the conflict to accept whatever recommendation results from the arbitration of such designated ministers;
 5. When this regional appeals group meets, there should be present at least two members (including the chair) of the Credentials Committee involved in the action under review. Previous evidence should be examined and any new evidence introduced;
 6. A complete written report of the action of the regional appeals group should be directed to all parties involved, with a copy forwarded to the Committee on Credentials.
- C.** Formally request a binding arbitration hearing with a certified Christian arbitrator, the cost of which will be carried by the person(s) seeking arbitration. Binding arbitration shall require a written document of agreement concerning the terms of arbitration. While each circumstance will require some specific language, standard arbitration language should include:
1. A statement signed by both the person filing the grievance and the committee agreeing to abide by the decision of the arbitration.
 2. A statement signed by both the person filing the grievance and the committee agreeing to the person or persons who will serve as arbiter or arbitration team.

3. A statement signed by both the person filing the grievance and the committee agreeing to the specifics of the conflict.

Subsequent to the decisions of the arbitrator, the special meeting of the assembly, or the regional appeals group, there remains no other appeal, and such decisions will be final.

7.8 The Role of Church of God Ministries and the Committee on Credentials in the Appeal Process

Church of God Ministries recognizes the validity of responsible action on the part of a properly constituted and recognized Assembly of the Church of God, including actions on matters of ministerial or congregational discipline. Problems arise, however, when ministers, congregations, and even assemblies disagree on the correctness of an action, or when they reach an impasse that blocks any action being taken. In such rare instances, the larger church must become involved. An appeal can be made by any party involved to the Committee on Credentials of the General Assembly of the Church of God (COC).

In addressing such appeals, the COC will give priority to the stance of service rather than authority. Its primary role is to effect reconciliation and redemption and to promote understanding and fair practice. On rare occasions, however, it may need to act definitively to settle an issue otherwise lacking a solution.

APPENDIX A

Establishment of a “STANDING COMMITTEE ON CREDENTIALS” General Assembly of the Church of God, June 2017

WHEREAS, the newly completed 2017 edition of the *Credentials Manual* of the Church of God will require ongoing interpretation, implementation, review, and occasional revision; and

WHEREAS, such requirements should be addressed in a timely manner, with issues not delayed and accumulated over several years; and

WHEREAS, there could be established a representative standing body of leaders of the Church of God charged with the responsibility of managing the ongoing life of the *Credentials Manual*; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED that the 2017 General Assembly of the Church of God hereby establish an ongoing body to be known as the “standing Committee on Credentials” (SCC), accountable directly to the General Assembly of Church of God; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this new SCC be empowered to act on behalf of the General Assembly in the implementation, interpretation, review, and future revision(s) of the *Credentials Manual* of the General Assembly, always acting in accord with formal stances of the General Assembly on any related matters; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the SCC be comprised of seventeen members, all ordained ministers of the Church of God, namely: a representative of Church of God Ministries, Committee Chair; four regional pastors; three members of different credentials committees in the United States; the president or designate of one of the institutions of higher education of the Church of God; a representative of the National Association of the Church of God; a representative of the Hispanic Concilio of the Church of God; a representative of a Church of God congregation with attendance of 1,000 or more; a representative of a Church of God congregation with attendance of 200-999; a representative of a Church of God congregation with attendance under 200; a representative from Canada; a representative from Home Missions; and a representative from Global Strategy; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Chair of the SCC be a member named by the General Director of Church of God Ministries from that staff, with the other sixteen members elected by the General Assembly of the Church of God or its Ministries Council. Elected members serve terms of four years each, with no more than two consecutive terms. The initial elections in 2017 shall be a balanced staggering of two-year and four-year terms, all being four-year terms thereafter. The Ministries Council fills vacancies as they occur.