



PROVISIONAL CREDENTIALING REQUIREMENTS FOR CONGREGATIONS

Two categories of credentialing status exist for Church of God congregations. The goal of congregations is to obtain full certification in the Church of God movement. In most cases, however, the road to full certification requires provisional credentialing.

The Credentials Manual (2011)¹ positively affirms the provisional status of congregations resulting from new church planting (see section 6.23). In these cases, the local congregation agrees to two wide parameters including a) working cooperatively with the credentials committee, especially in such matters as calling a pastor and supply preachers; and b) ensuring conformity to the norms set forth for all Church of God congregations (see section 6.11). The local church will also receive counsel on health matters from the State Administrator and/or credentialing committee as well as having periodic reviews as the congregation moves toward obtaining full certification. Congregations seeking certification from other avenues will undergo other measures to determine its viability within the Church of God movement.

As provisional status is generally the first step in the credentialing process, a few steps are important **before** provisional status may be granted. These steps are outlined below.

Step 1: Ensuring by-laws of the church meet non-profit approval.

The church seeking provisional status will provide a copy of the by-laws to the State Administrator or his/her representative for review. The review assesses the by-laws in two main areas. The first is to confirm the by-laws meet the legal standards for non-profit religious organizations. The second is to ensure adequate language and substance exists to protect the congregation and pastor from potential harm.

Step 2: Attesting the validity of a proper non-profit designation.

A local church may obtain non-profit status in one of two ways. One may be to obtain a 501(c)(3) directly from the I.R.S. The second is to obtain a letter of designation from the state office. This letter cannot be issued, however, until the local congregation has secured a federal EIN number. Both methods of federal designation are entirely sufficient and equal to satisfy the requirements of law necessary to issue charitable contribution credit to donors. (Note: Neither path provides tax-exemption status for the state of Texas.)

Step 3: The Pastor

The pastor of the local congregation must be a properly credentialed person in good standing in the Church of God with both the national and state office.

¹ The Credential Manual is available for download on the Church of God website (currently www.chog.org).

Step 4: The congregation must prove uniformity with Church of God aspirations.

The following aspirations listed below may also be found in the Credentials Manual (2011) in section 6.11.

- A. Is a nurturing local body of believers providing fellowship, inspiration, and support to all within its reach.
- B. Is obedient to God's call to mission at home and around the world.
- C. Provides opportunity for growing in Christian grace and equipping for service.
- D. Lives in harmony with the doctrines and teachings of the Word of God as commonly understood by the teaching heritage of the Church of God movement. For definition of this heritage, see the recommended readings listed in section 2.13.
- E. Upholds a lifestyle characterized by holiness, service, and wise stewardship, as taught by the Bible and consistent with established practices of the Church of God movement.
- F. Is involved in area, district, state, and national ministries of the Church of God movement, including such joint activities as worship, training, recreation, and mission projects.
- G. Endeavors to live peaceably as pastors and members with one another and their neighbors.
- H. Is supportive, respectful, and nurturing of all deserving overseers, including its pastor(s) and duly elected leaders.
- I. By both prayer and financial support, contributes to the world mission of the church through the cooperative ministries of the Church of God movement.
- J. Registers annually for the *Yearbook* of the Church of God and otherwise intentionally links itself to the life of the Church of God movement.
- K. Invites the counsel of the state office, area assembly's credentialing committee, regional pastor/overseer, and/or Church of God Ministries, Anderson, Indiana, during times of pastoral change or congregational conflict.
- L. Abides by the procedures for calling a new pastor as outlined in the section of this *Credentials Manual* titled "When Ministers Move..." (see section 5.00).
- M. Is governed by the Holy Spirit, giving decisional authority to pastors and lay leaders as one way to allow Christ preeminence in all things.
- N. 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.
- O. Maintains 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 (Anderson).

Step 5: Functions in harmony with the Church of God

Once step 4 has been completed (as applicable), the credentials committee will then take one of the following actions: a) provide certification (either full or provisional); b) recommend additional steps; or c) deny the request for certification. The congregation is expected to uphold the standards set forth in the Credentials Manual (2011). Assuming provisional status is granted, after a period of time in which no issues arise (usually 2 years), the congregation may then be allowed full certification.

Important Notes on Certification

According to section 4.30, it is the responsibility of the individual minister and congregation to maintain ordination and registration. In Texas, this means completing registration processes with both the national office (due by September 1) and the state office (due by April 1).

Section 4.52 emphasizes this point in the following way: “Because of legal statutes applicable to not-for-profit organizations, it is essential that congregations register annually with their assemblies and with Church of God Ministries, Anderson, Indiana, for proper listing in the *Yearbook* of the Church of God. Failure to register for two consecutive years may result in the loss of a congregation’s 501(c)(3) status. If this loss occurs, the congregation is no longer eligible to submit contribution reports for IRS purposes.”

In addition to the above important notes, the role of the credentials committee should also be cited. According to section 7.20, the following may also take place:

“The credentialing committee 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 congregational bylaws.

Additionally, the credentialing 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 movement, 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 movement. Credentialing committees will investigate and make recommendations to the congregational staff and leadership. “

For more information on the provisional process, please contact the State Office or the credentials committee chairperson.