

# CREENTIALING 2.0

## TEXAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

### BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The process of credentialing through an associated body like the Texas General Assembly of the Church of God (TGA) presents a dilemma for some in the church. For these people, God is the One who credentials, not man. Thus, it is His prerogative to say who can and can't function as His minister here on earth. Others would have problems with formal credentialing processes in that all are called to a life of ministry and the role of a "professional" clergy seems antithetical to the biblical text. Valuable insights may be gained from these two positions and it is appropriate for any theological stance regarding credentialing to be sensitive to them. Even so, the role of credentialing as understood by this body affirms God's prerogative to call and the essential role all persons play in the mission of the church. It further admits, however, that there is an important and indispensable role for the formal credentialing of persons to ministry.

Credentialing *in general* is the process of endorsement in which a person, group, or body recognizes someone as having fulfilled a prescribed standard of requirements. This process may be formal, informal, extensive, or simple. The ultimate function is the certification of acceptability into a field or group.

Ministerial credentialing *as practiced here* is the endorsement of a person by a group of persons (body and fellowship) to hold a certain place in the church based upon a set standard of requirements. In this sense, credentialing has always played a role in the life of the church. In early times, the recognition of an elder statesman through culturally accepted standards enabled one to lead as with people like Abraham. Moses received a personal invitation from God to leadership but this calling was verified both by miracles and the community. Even the highly spiritualized role of a prophet in the older testament mandated community acceptance in order to be received as one sent from God. In the early church, the author of Acts notes that while Barnabas and Saul were "set apart...for the work to which I [the Spirit] have called them," it was the community who empowered this call and "sent them off." (Acts 13: 2-3)

It is not the role of the TGA to call people to ministry: this belongs to God. It is the appropriate and legitimate role of the church, through its appointed structures, to access, accept, and empower the calling of men and women to ministry (in this case the TGA). The Credentials Manual (2011) states the following:

"The intent of this *Credentials Manual* is to provide the basis for standards and processes to be used by all recognized ministerial credentialing units associated with the Church of God movement (Anderson, Indiana) in the United States and Canada. It intends to put biblical foundations into definitional and operational terms for the current recognition and practice of Christian ministry in the Church of God movement. It attempts to reflect the proper balance between legitimate autonomy and needed authority in the church's life."

While the credentialing of a formal clergy is a highly spiritual and religious activity, this function in the current environment has a unique set of potentially susceptible exposures. First, in the highly litigious milieu of our day, issues of malpractice, abuse, and ethical violations require new levels of attending by the credentialing body. Second, the waning reputational standing of the clergy among the general populace warrants closer supervision to ensure those credentialed reflect a high standard of clergy. Third, the separation by geographical distance and the great need for interaction and the ministry of presence further propels a desire for contact. Research shows isolation provides an all-too-easy environment in which sin can grow.

**The enhanced process arose out of a vision to have a high-quality credentialing system.**

As such, this enhanced process is meant to provide value to the ministry of the TGA.

Specifically, the new process as presented is intended to accomplish the following goals:

1. Provide greater legal protection to the Assembly by establishing and communicating clear standards for those who are credentialed;
2. Elevate standards of community for those who are in the credentialed body;
3. Ensure a quality clergy emerges from the credentialing process;
4. Achieve a non-politicized and fair process for all person entering the process;
5. Increase compliance with the national manual to help ensure standards compare reasonably across state lines;
6. Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the total credentialing practice; and
7. Share the financial cost of the entire credentialing activities of the TGA.

## **Two Functions of Credentialing Specifically Addressed**

There are many activities the TGA credentialing committee performs over the course of the ministry year. All of these activities will not be reviewed or amended in the process envisioned in this document. Rather, these functions fall into goal #5 noted above. The area where the proposed process does impact state ministry is in the following two areas:

- Credentialing of Persons Entering Ministry
- Continued Certification of Persons in Ministry

### **CREDENTIALING OF PERSONS ENTERING MINISTRY**

The receiving and accepting of God's call to ministry is a joyous and somber moment for the person receiving the call. The movement, then, from acceptance of a call to credentialing by the church body should reflect both the joyous and serious nature of the experience. In this enhanced version of credentialing, we see this process as more than a credentialing activity but also a leadership building activity. This difference will be reflected in the way in which persons move through the process and the kinds of activities used to certify the meeting of an accepted standard outlined in the *Credentials Manual*. The following chart illustrates the movement desired.

## **CONTINUED CERTIFICATION OF PERSONS IN MINISTRY**

Once a person enters ministry as a credentialed person (which takes place upon commissioning), this person falls under the accountability of the TGA through the credentials committee. In the past, very little expectation was required once credentialed or monitored thereafter, except that holy living was compelled. This aspect of credentialed life has been renovated. Two charts are provided below. The first lists and explains the new requirements. The second illustrates a sample yearly timeline for the implementation and oversight of the renovations.

### NEW REQUIREMENTS

#### 1. Annual Registration Requirement

The annual registration fee is asked of all ministers, regardless of type of credential or employment status. Thus, each credentialed minister is asked to complete a Texas Registration Form to maintain his/her current credentialed status. Along with this form, an annual registration fee of \$20.00 (\$0.00 for retired pastors) is submitted. Fees are used to support the enhanced system. Failure to comply will result in being placed on probationary status for the next year. A probationary form will be added to their permanent file. If the fees are brought current in the next year (\$40.00), then the minister is returned to good standing. Should two consecutive years pass without compliance, the minister may have his/her credentials withdrawn.

#### 2. Annual Participation Requirement

Each credentialed minister shall attend at least 1 Credentialing Mini-Conference during the calendar year (events do not carry over from year to year). Failure to comply will result in being placed on probationary status for the next year. A probationary form will be added to their permanent file. Exceptions may be made to this rule by doctor's order or under special circumstances as reviewed and approved by the credentials committee.

#### 3. Congregation Registration and Fees

Congregations are asked to meet the standards set forth in section 6.11 and as regulated in 4.22 of the *Credentials Manual 2011*. Congregations are also requested to register annually with TGA. The fee for congregational registration is \$50.00. Failure to comply will result in being placed on provisional status for the next year. To bring the congregation current, the fees will need to be brought current. Should two consecutive years pass without compliance, the congregation will have its credentials withdrawn. The general policies of 6.12 in the *Credentials Manual 2011* will apply.

*Note: all fees noted above are in addition to the annual registration requirements imposed by the national office.*

Fees and forms may be completed online at [www.texaschurchofgod.org](http://www.texaschurchofgod.org).