

Why become ordained?

I often hear that question verbalized and it deserves an intelligent answer. Often the question is voiced by a person who has jumped through the hoops within the Northwest Ministry Network and the Assemblies of God to receive one of the two pre-ordination levels of ministerial recognition as a certified or licensed minister. The unspoken context of the full question is probably, “Since I can already serve as a pastor, preach, teach, marry, and conduct other ministerial functions with my current credential, why become ordained?” Actually there are a number of biblical/theological, organizational, and practical reasons for doing so. Please let me share a few of them with you.

The dictionary defines ordination as “a ceremony of consecration to the ministry.” Depending upon the denominational context, the word implies the act of granting pastoral authority or sacerdotal power. Within the Assemblies of God, ordination generally takes place at the District Council level, in our case during the Northwest Ministry Network Annual Conference. The actual ordination ceremony celebrates and affirms the divine call to ministry experienced by the candidate and certifies that the individual minister has met the educational and experiential qualifications to be ordained.

Ordination provides the highest recognition and affirmation of ministry possible within the Assemblies of God and is recognized both nationally and internationally. During the ordination ceremony the candidate responds to a charge to preach the gospel, and prayers of ordination are accompanied by the laying on of hands by the presbytery. Such prayers invoke the anointing of the Holy Spirit to confirm God’s call and empowerment through ordination. It is a watershed moment in the life of the ordination candidate, as the culmination of years of preparation from the time of the initial call. Many indicate a special reverence for the individuals involved, the time, and place as the moment frequently is accompanied by emotional and spiritual dynamics that are forever remembered.

The word ordain in the Bible refers to a setting in place or designation; for example, Joseph was “ordained” as a ruler in Egypt (Acts 7:10); the steward in Jesus’ parable was “ordained” to oversee a household (Matthew 24:45); deacons were “ordained” to serve the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1-6); and pastors were “ordained” in each city in Crete (Titus 1:5). Acts 13 includes a good example of a ministerial appointment: “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia” (vs. 2-4). It is God Himself who calls individuals to the ministry and qualifies them with gifts (Acts 20:28; Ephesians

4:11). The leaders of the church recognize God's calling, gifts, and enablement of the individual. With prayer and fasting, the church lays hands on the candidate to demonstrate their commissioning (cf. Acts 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:22).

Paul regularly ordained pastors for the churches he planted. He and Barnabas directed the appointment or ordination of elders "in each church" in Galatia (Acts 14:23). He instructed Titus to "appoint elders in every town" on Crete (Titus 1:5). Titus himself had been ordained earlier, when "he was chosen by the churches" (2 Corinthians 8:19). Paul encouraged young Timothy to "stir up" the gifts of God that had been given through the laying on of hands (2 Timothy 1:6-7). An ordained minister will meet the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-16 and Titus 1:5-9, and will possess a consuming desire to spread the Gospel and be engaged in viable ministry (1 Corinthians 9:16).

On a practical level, ordination enhances your ministry opportunities in the following ways:

- Many local church bylaws require the lead pastor to be ordained.
- The certified or license credentials were not intended to be a "terminal" or end in themselves. The expectation, with a few exceptions, most generally is that the minister will continue to grow and exhibit the fruit of his or her calling by pursuing and obtaining ordination.
- Organizationally, ordination is required for service on the presbytery level by the NWMN bylaws or to serve on a national level within the Assemblies of God.
- U.S. military chaplains and certain institutional chaplain appointments require ordination.
- Within most local community contexts, ordination is recognized as the official and credible designation of a minister.
- Engaging in the learning process necessary to meet the educational requirements for ordination almost always is a reward in itself. The minister models a life-long learning model and gains important biblical/theological and leadership skills in the process.
- You will feel a special bond with the other members of your ordination class that will enhance your relationships beyond the level of being certified or licensed.

I hope this will encourage you to pursue ordination and provide at least a partial answer to the question, "Why become ordained." Please feel free to contact me or our credentialing specialist, Beth Backes, if we can answer any further questions or help you take the next steps toward ordination and fulfilling God's call upon your life.

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