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# ASSEMBLIES OF GOD VIEW OF ORDINATION

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*This statement on the Assemblies of God view of ordination was accepted by the General Presbytery in 1976.*

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The view of ordination in the Assemblies of God is predicated upon biblical principles and is consonant with the evangelical view. The following characteristics comprise the Assemblies of God view.

Ordination can be defined as the public ceremony by which the Movement acknowledges the divine call, commission, and qualification of a person to ministry in the Assemblies of God; extends its blessings, fellowship, and opportunities; receives his pledge of dedication, faithfulness, and loyalty; and invokes divine enablement for success in life and ministry.

Ordination is held to be spiritual and functional rather than sacerdotal. It is important as a public acknowledgment of God's prior call and commission, but it is not essential. All Christians are equal, but ministers are set apart for special, full-time Christian service and leadership. When necessary, the laity can perform all of the functions of ministry except those for which the State requires an ordained minister.

Ordination is performed only after a careful examination of the candidate as to qualification on six essential points:

1. The genuineness of his Christian experience;
2. The sufficiency of his spiritual, moral, emotional, and social maturity;
3. The reality of his divine call;
4. The correctness of his doctrine;
5. The adequacy of his preparation and practical abilities; and
6. The acceptability of his allegiance to the Movement's policies and programs.

Authority and power for ministry are conferred directly by Christ through the Holy Spirit, not through those who perform the ordination ceremony. No particular man or group is essential to the ordination process. Those who participate are dispensable instruments. The stress is upon an immediate spiritual connection with Christ rather than a historical episcopal (apostolic) succession. The living Lord of the Church is making direct, dynamic appointments in His body today.

Ordination is held to be of concern to the whole Church, not just the local assembly. This is indicated by the fact that the apostles, whose ministry was international in scope, presided in each of the five New Testament ceremonies of ordination. Therefore, in the Assemblies of God the ordination is conducted at district level by the superintendent with the imposition of hands and prayers of the District Presbytery. It is recognized by the Executive Presbytery of the General Council and is signed by the general superintendent and general secretary. Also, since ministers participated in each of the

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New Testament ceremonies, presbyters and other senior ministers are involved in Assemblies of God ordination in the laying on of hands and prayer.

The Assemblies of God stresses the importance of the spiritual quality of the ordination ceremony as opposed to a formal ritual. Typical Assemblies of God ordinations include fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands, preaching, a charge, and other elements which were seen in the New Testament ceremonies of ordination.

Ordination is available to men or women who meet the biblical qualifications proposed for bishops in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, and who are fulfilling one of the types of proclamation-oriented ministry given to the Church by Christ in Ephesians 4:11. These are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers (bishops/ elders). Those fulfilling a ministry as directors of youth, music, or Christian education may qualify for a Christian Workers Certificate or specialized license but are not afforded ordination if they do not fulfill the basic preaching-pastoral ministry. Those fulfilling a ministry of temporalities (deacons) are appointed to a tenure of service but without credentials.

### **Benefits of Ordination**

#### *Benefits to the Minister*

A first benefit is that ordination serves as a goal which represents a high level of spiritual, moral, emotional, social, intellectual, and ministerial maturity. This is not an end in itself, for the ordained minister will need to continue to grow in all of these areas personally and professionally.

A second benefit is that ordination provides the minister the opportunity of corporate judgement as to the genuineness of his Christian experience; the sufficiency of his spiritual, moral, emotional, and social maturity; the reality of his divine call; the correctness of his doctrine; the adequacy of his preparation and practical abilities; and the acceptability of his allegiance to the Movement's policies and programs.

A third benefit is that ordination is recognized as a mature level of personal and professional accomplishment in all of the areas mentioned in benefit number above. Thus, ordination becomes the goal, test, and testimony of personal and professional maturity and effectiveness.

Ordination provides a fourth benefit in that it opens opportunities of ministry in the Assemblies of God movement. It is an essential key for acceptance in pastoral, evangelistic, administrative, teaching, chaplaincy, and other ministries. A corollary to this is that ministry in the Movement provides reasonable assurance that the fruit of one's ministry will be preserved.

A fifth benefit of ordination is that it qualifies the minister to meet civil requirements for certain functions of ministry such as funerals, weddings, and serving on certain community, state, and federal boards or agencies, etc.

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A sixth benefit of ordination is that it allows a minister to participate fully in the life of the Movement—supporting, contributing to the formulation of policies and programs, refining doctrine, holding office, and many other general or specific benefits.

#### *Benefits to the Movement*

In the first place, ordination benefits the Movement by insuring that its ministry is comprised of individuals who are qualified by virtue of the genuineness of their Christian experience, the reality of their divine call, and the sufficiency of their spiritual, moral, emotional, and social maturity to have an effective ministry.

A second benefit to the Movement is that ordination provides a checkpoint to insure a ministry which has sufficient and correct understanding of Bible content and doctrine in order to edify the body of Christ and not bring disharmony.

Ordination benefits the Movement by guaranteeing an effective level of practical ability for the ministerial functions of preaching/teaching: worship leading, administering the ordinances and performing the ceremonies, pastoral care and the administration (oversight and planning) for the departments, deacons, committees, staff, finances, public relations, building programs, etc.

And finally, ordination benefits the Movement by ascertaining that its ministers have an acceptable knowledge of and loyalty to the policies and programs of the Assemblies of God.

### **Qualifications for Ordination**

The qualifications for bishops, as set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, are the norm for all ministers today, along with stated qualifications taken from the General Council Constitution and Bylaws. In addition, the following groups of attributes are recommended for the ordained minister.

#### *Spiritual Attributes*

The following spiritual attributes are essential to a most productive ministry: A devotional spirit; love (for God, the ministry, people, 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Timothy 6:11, 12; 1 John 3:16); faith (Romans 12:3-8; 2 Corinthians 3:5, 6; 5:18-20; Ephesians 3:7; 4:11; Colossians 1:23-29; 1 Thessalonians 1:3) humility (Proverbs 15:33; Romans 12:3); convictions (Jude 3); dedication (total commitment to God's will); a ministerial spirit (an aptitude to give service; to be solicitous over the well-being and growth of people spiritually, morally, socially, etc.); and faithfulness (1 Corinthians 4:1, 2 in stewardship of time, spiritual preparation, business matters, etc.).

#### *Moral Attributes*

The following moral attributes are essential to a most productive ministry: integrity (basic honesty and wholeness of character, spiritual honesty (Psalm 51:6), intellectual honesty, honesty in preaching, and in everyday dealings) and moral purity (Isaiah 52:11; Galatians 1:10; 2:11-14; 1 Timothy 6:11-14; 2 Timothy 1:7, 9).

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### *Emotional Attributes*

It is quite likely that more inefficiency and failure in the ministry are caused by emotional and personality deficiencies than by ill health, moral defection, and lack of training, education, or talent. Because of this it is most important that the preacher be very mature in self-understanding and healthy emotionally. If he has unresolved emotional problems, violent mood swings, personality conflicts, or fails under duress it will greatly affect his attitudes in the pulpit as well as determine his attitudes in all of his interpersonal relationships. At least the following seven emotional attributes of character are important to the minister: A sanctified temperament (Galatians 5:22, 23); a sense of proportion (balance of humor and seriousness); enthusiasm; realism; a sense of the beautiful (Philippians 4:8; Titus 1:15); sympathy (Romans 12:15; Hebrews 5:1); and patience (Romans 5:1-5; 2 Peter 1:5-8).

### *Intellectual Attributes*

The following intellectual attributes are important for the minister: Studiousness; regimentation (reasonably well-organized); moderation (in views rather than radical extremes, 1 Corinthians 9:25; Galatians 5:23; Philippians 4:5; Titus 1:8; 2 Peter 1:6); logic; imagination; power of concentration; memory (John 14:26); and wisdom (James 1:5).

### *Social Attributes*

Among the social attributes which are essential to the minister are the following: Sociability, knowledge of human nature, lack of prejudice, a cooperative attitude, a conciliatory disposition, respect for authority, teachability, and loyalty (to family, church, the Movement, associates, and friends).

### *Practical Attributes*

It is essential to a productive ministry that the minister develop his practical ability to perform the functions of the ministry with skill. It is important that ministers study Bible and theology in order to educate their heads, but is important that they study practical theology in order to educate their mouths and hands as well. The minister should cultivate the spiritual and practical abilities requisite to the functions of preaching/teaching, worship, administering the ordinances, pastoral care, and administration.

## **The Process of Ordination**

Ordination in the Assemblies of God is an orderly process which involves prescribed key personnel, advancement in ministerial levels, examination, and the ordination service itself.

### *Organizational Structure and Ordination*

The key personnel in the organizational structure with respect to ordination of a minister are his pastor, presbyter and sectional committee, and district superintendent and district presbytery. The pastor is essential to process as the one who grooms the candidate

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spiritually, trains him for ministry, and recommends him to the presbyter and/or examining committee. The district council ordination committee examines the candidate ultimately, and the district superintendent and the district presbytery ordain him.

The General Council Executive Presbytery recognizes the ordination by the district, and the General Council executive officers witness to the ordination by their signatures and seal on the ordination certificate.

### *Steps to Ordination*

A person seeking ordination in the Assemblies of God seeks counsel from his pastor and a letter of recommendation from him to the sectional presbyter. The presbyter arranges for the candidate to fill out an application for additional credentials with the district and be examined by the sectional committee. Upon their approval, he is granted initial credentials by the district. He must maintain an acceptable ministry at the licensed level for a minimum of 2 years and be at least 23 years of age before being invited to write for ordination. This is to insure his maturity personally and professionally (“not a novice,” 1 Timothy 3:6). Upon his presentation of an application for ordination to the sectional presbyter, he is examined again by the sectional committee. On their approval, he is allowed to meet the district council ordination committee by whom he is examined once more. Upon their approval, he is ordained in a special service at the district council and receives an ordination certificate from the General Council. This credential is renewed annually by the minister filling out a questionnaire, which is filed with his district and the General Council.

### *Examination for Ordination*

The sectional committee and/or the district council ordination committee by written examination and oral interview shall examine the candidate upon the following points:

1. The genuineness of his Christian experience
2. The reality of his divine call to the ministry
3. The sufficiency of his spiritual, moral, emotional, and social maturity.
4. The sufficiency and correctness of his understanding of Bible content and doctrine
5. The adequacy of his preparation and practical abilities.
6. The acceptability of his knowledge of and allegiance to the Movement’s policies and programs.

### *The Ceremony of Ordination*

The Assemblies of God stresses the importance of the spiritual quality of the ordination service as opposed to a formal ritual. While we do not believe as the sacramentalists do that a supernatural grace and power are communicated by our words and hands, we do believe fully that Christ can and will (if He hasn’t already) impart the grace and power necessary to the fulfillment of the ministry as we pray and lay hands on the ordinand. Thus the ordination service provides, in addition to its public acknowledgement that the ordinand has been called, commissioned, and qualified for mature ministry, an opportunity for the minister to make a fuller consecration of his life and receive the

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maximum grace and power for service. It provides opportunity for one of the most significant spiritual experiences of his life.

Typical Assemblies of God ordination services include fasting , prayer for candidates with the imposition of hands by the elders, preaching, a scriptural charge, and other New Testament elements of worship.

### **Responsibilities of Ordination**

Ordination to full gospel ministry is a most responsible step for all concerned. Grave responsibilities fall to the Movement which ordains, to the minister who is ordained, and to those who are ministered to by the ordained.

#### *Responsibilities of the Movement*

It is the responsibility of the Movement to ordain only ministers who are highly qualified on the biblical qualifications as represented in the six points of examination.

It is the Movement's responsibility to solicit the highest levels of personal life and ministerial proficiency among its ordained ministers.

It is the Movement's responsibility to provide means of spiritual, moral, emotional, social, intellectual, and professional growth among its ordained ministers.

It is the Movement's responsibility to provide opportunities for fruitful ministry.

#### *Responsibilities of the Minister*

It is the minister's responsibility to achieve, with the Lord's help, the highest level of qualifications he can on the biblical qualifications as represented in the six points of examination.

It is the minister's responsibility to maintain the highest level of personal life and ministerial proficiency that the Lord can help him to achieve. It is advisable to review the definition of ordination, the biblical qualifications, and the six points of examination each year when filling out the ordination questionnaire, as a self-check and as an incentive to continue growing.

It is the minister's responsibility to enter into opportunities of ministry with dedication, love, faith, anointing, and faithfulness in order to render service acceptable to those to whom he ministers, to the Movement, and to the Lord.

#### *Responsibilities of Those Ministered To*

It is the responsibility of those to whom one ministers to:

1. Accept him as God's messenger (Luke 10:16; 1 Corinthians 4:1; Galatians 4:14).
2. Pray for him (Romans 15:30; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 6:18, 19; Hebrews 13:18).

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3. Love and respect him (2 Corinthians 8:7; 1 Thessalonians 3:6; 5:12, 13).
  4. Follow and obey him (1 Corinthians 11:1, 16:16; Philippians 3:17; Hebrews 13:7, 17).
  5. Support him generously financially (1 Corinthians 9:7-14; Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17, 18).

### **Enhancing the Ordained Ministry**

No vocation is more worthy of a goal of excellence than the gospel ministry. Since ordination is the goal, test, and testimony of maturity and proficiency in life and ministry, it is the primary point at which concentrated effort should occur. The following suggestions are made in the interest of enhancing the ministry through the process leading to ordination and afterward as well.

1. Each person receiving initial credentials should receive a copy of the General Council position paper on ordination for careful study as he progresses to ordination.
2. Credentials committees should take their work very seriously. They should be sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit as to who should be ordained (Acts 13:2; 14:26; 20:28). They should maintain high standards of qualification and not be reluctant to extend the probationary license period for another year or longer on any doubtful candidates. They should examine candidates for Christian Workers Certificates and all step-ups very carefully on the six points that have repeatedly been dealt with in this paper.
3. An extensive questionnaire should be developed on character, emotional problems, views on human relations, spiritual and practical matters, etc., which could be administered by presbyters to those seeking credentials and step-ups. This tool could be the basis of one or more counseling sessions by the presbyter, a committeeman, or a designated sectional counselor. Such a questionnaire would become a worksheet in the minister's file with space for notes of strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations by the committee. This would contribute to better analysis, continuity, and follow-up until the candidate is ordained. It would be kept in a confidential file until the candidate reached ordination and would then be destroyed.
4. Require a minister anticipating ordination to write, during his period of license, his credo on doctrine and the functions of ministry. This would be read by the presbyter and sectional committee and kept on file until the candidate's ordination and then returned to him. The credo, and questionnaire mentioned above, would be utilized to help the candidate achieve self-understanding and the ability to express his beliefs clearly. Also they would provide the credentials committee insight into the personality, beliefs, strengths, and needs of the candidate. They would be used for counseling and growth of the candidate, and not as tests for him to pass.
5. Supplement the work of the home pastor and the presbyter and sectional committee and keep on file until ministerial counseling service at sectional or metropolitan level. This would not necessarily require a professionally trained counselor doing in-depth or

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long-term counseling. Mature ministers could staff the counseling service on a rotating basis or a superannuated minister or ministers could be appointed to provide the service. These elders could provide excellent counsel out of years of experience, have continuing ministry, and some remuneration if a fee were advisable. This would provide a much-needed service for ministers in general, and for young ministers and their companions in particular, as they recognized the need for help in their lives and ministries. This service would help relieve the workload of presbyters; help young preachers to achieve personal, domestic, and ministerial growth; and increase the harmony and progress in the assemblies.

6. Make the ordination ceremony a truly important spiritual experience. We know that much fasting and prayer was standard procedure in the Early Church. We would be careful to retain not just the outward symbolism, laying on of hands, but also the spiritual exercises of fasting and prayer in our ordination service (Acts 13:3).

7. Stress the importance of both basic and continuing education. While we do not require certain formal studies or degrees for ordination (resolution adopted by 1951 General Council, p. 9; see Constitution Art. X., par. D., 1975 GCM, p. 83), the Movement is committed to the importance of education for ministry, and the majority of those being ordained today are graduates of Assemblies of God Bible colleges. Those who cannot attend a resident Bible college are urged to study through extension classes, correspondence programs, institutes, seminars, and reading programs (2 Timothy 2:15).

8. Stress at all opportunities (Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Bible colleges and institutes, etc.) substantive spiritual, moral, ethical, emotional, social, intellectual, and practical matters.

9. Keep Assemblies of God Bible colleges and the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary staffed with administrators and faculty members who are proven to be mature in character and emotional, social, and spiritual life; dedicated to Bible holiness, Pentecostal distinctives, doctrines, and Assemblies of God policies and programs; proven in ministerial success; and currently anointed, active in ministry, and in touch with the vital issues of the ministry.

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised (Luke 4:18).*

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