

Licensed Credential Orientation

8.19.2021

Congratulations on this important step.

A. Today is a day that I hope serves as a signpost in your ministry journey.

1. What you are doing today is an opportunity for people who are further in their ministry journey to confirm your calling.

2. The Presbytery do not call ministers into ministry, but assist in recognizing and confirming your calling.

B. Today, should all go well in your interviews, you will be approved for licensed minister credentials.

1. My task is to give you some encouragement and some instruction that will assist you in achieving an effective and long-term life of ministry.

2. I want to share 3rs of Credentials: Requirements, Rights, Responsibilities.

3. Then, with the time left, I want to share insights from my own spiritual and pastoral journey.

#1. Rights of License Credentials.

A. Within the state of MO, credentialed ministers have the right to:

1. Marry and bury people.

2. If you are employed by the church, you can take advantage of the IRS tax benefits including housing allowance.

B. Within the A/G, licensed ministers can be senior/lead pastors.

1. You can serve in Sectional leadership.

2. Vote at District and General Councils.

C. You should pursue Ordination for a few reasons:

1. Some organizations require ordination (military or hospital chaplaincy).

2. The A/G limits certain offices and opportunities for those who are ordained.

a. Presbyters are to be ordained.

b. District leadership are to be ordained.

c. Licensed step is a working credential, a time of preparing and discovery.

d. It is a step, not a landing spot.

3. Also, to quote our Executive Secretary, you should pursue ordination because it is the only credential mentioned in Scripture.

a. I confess that ordination is a monumental moment for all that are ordained.

b. Let me encourage you to take the necessary classes and pursue ordination in two-years.

#2. Requirements of License Credentials.

A. First, you must pay your dues.

1. Licensed minister's dues are \$240 per year to General Council.

a. You must renew every year.

b. This can all be done online.

2. Second, half of all minister's tithes are given to the District Council and half are given to your local church.

a. This requirement varies by District.

b. Many Districts require up to 100% of minister's tithe be paid to the District.

3. Third, \$10 a month is required to the Minister's Benevolence Fund here at the District.

a. Why? This is not insurance.

b. Here is why this exists: Imagine you were one of the many thousands of people who have given their lives to pastoring and serving churches.

c. Many of them never made much money, barely surviving and making ends meet.

d. When this dear and faithful servant passes, the money given from MBF provides additional comfort, security, and appreciation to the family in a very difficult time.

1. Years ago, the District would announce the loss of a credentialed minister and provide opportunity for people to give to the family.

2. The well-known pastors would receive large offerings, while the unknowns would receive very little.

3. MBF provides a financial gift for all of our ministers and their families at the loss of the credentialed minister.

4. Full members receive \$6,000 death benefit.

B. Take advantage of AG Financial.

1. This is not a requirement.

a. But, AG Financial provides a valuable service to us through a 403b.

b. They will also provide financial planning and help.

2. Because the AG does not have a mandatory retirement plan, you need to take seriously your financial future, especially if you are a full-time minister.

3. AG Financial can help with this, so can Rhonda Amer who has been a blessing to me personally in the area of financial advice.

C. Support Missions and the Local Church.

1. You are required to be part of a local church.

a. Sometime ago, my church came alongside another church for a season during a pastoral transition.

b. During a 6-month period, I was responsible in making sure this particular church's pulpit was filled each week.

c. One week I received a call asking if I would let this guy preach at this church.

d. It's a small-section, so I knew this man was not serving in any capacity at any church, so I informed him I would not use ministers who were not engaged at a local assembly: He called my presbyter on me.

e. **If you want opportunities to play, you have to show up to the ballpark.**

1. To receive credentials, you must be a member of a local church.

2. If you want to pursue opportunities, show up and serve.

2. And you should be required to give to missions.

a. We are a missions movement.

b. We should want to give generously to missions and encourage others to do the same.

#3. Responsibilities.

#1. Responsibility to Participate.

1. We are a voluntary, cooperative, fellowship.
 - a. To a great degree, you will receive from this fellowship what you put in it.
 - b. But no one can “make you” cooperate.
2. By becoming credentialed, you are declaring your willingness to participate, show up, and serve.
 - a. One of our strengths in the AG is our relationships.
 - b. It is a beautiful thing to develop lasting and lifetime relationships
3. If you never connect with your section, District, or Fellowship, you will not find fulfillment in being A/G.
 - a. Being part of this fellowship provides opportunities to develop relationships that you would not likely have developed.
 - b. Some relationships are for a lifetime and some relationships are seasonal.
 1. Some people come into my life at the right time for me to learn from them or to encourage them.
 2. Some people come into my life, and lifelong friendships develop.
 - c. We all need relationships in ministry.
 1. Relationships can provide energy when you are low.
 2. Relationships can bring support when in crises.
 3. Relationships can stir vision.
 4. Relationships help us push further and farther than we would on our own.

#2. Responsibility to Study, Grow, and Learn.

1. The A/G has very minimal educational requirements.
 - a. This is good in that we do not establish unnecessary barriers to ministry.
 - b. That also means that there is no formal expectation or accountability for growth.
2. The truth is, people can tell if you are studying, growing, and learning.
 - a. The longer you are in one place of ministry, the more important growth is.
 - b. Your colleagues and your congregation can tell if you are not growing as a minister.
3. Changing times require growing people.
 - a. Ministry today looks very different from when I took over as a lead pastor over a decade ago.
 - b. The challenges I face today are terribly more complex.
 - c. The scale is very different than when I started (a church of less than 20 to a church of 160).
 - d. **By failing to grow, I fail my Lord and my people.**

#3. Responsibility to Guard the Gifts.

- The statistics of ministry failure truly disappoints me.
- In five years eighty percent of you will not be in ministry.
- 1,800 pastors leave the ministry every month in America (not retirees).
- Sixty-five percent of ministers say they would leave the ministry if they could find work that could support them financially.
- Fifty percent of pastor's marriages will end in divorce.
- Seventy percent of pastors battle constantly with depression.
- Forty percent of ministers admit to extra-marital affairs.
- Seventy percent of pastors say they only read the Bible when preparing for a sermon.
- Ministers, on average, pray less than five minutes per day.

#3a. Guard the gift of Calling.

1. Ministry is UP and Down.

- a. There are seasons of great confirmation of your calling.
- b. There are seasons of great frustration.
- c. They usually follow each other.

2. So GUARD your calling:

- a. Don't leave a place you know God has called you to, unless you are clear God has called you away.
- b. Don't attach your calling and significance to external conditions.

3. Do guard your calling by:

- a. Guarding your devotion to the Lord.
- b. Guarding your heart (hardest for me).
 - 1. Discouragement.
 - 2. Resentment
 - 3. Frustration are all dangerous to the heart of ministers.
- c. Do not disqualify yourself from ministry.
 - 1. Gold, Glory, and Girls (Guys) are the downfalls of many ministers.
 - 2. Dr Jim Wilson states that the calling of God is irrevocable. Under a footnote he aptly writes:

Pastors may have to step down from service due to moral failure and will suffer the consequences of living under an unfulfilled call, but that does not mean God's call is nullified, just that they wasted their opportunity to fulfill God their call to pastoral ministry.

3. Do not waste your opportunity and your calling.

#3b. Guard the Gift of Ministry.

1. A dear friend of mine is superintendent of a public school.

a. Our jobs are similar in that they are heavy in leadership and administration.

b. As we share about our weeks, he has multiple times said, "It must be so cool to be doing something that matters everyday like being a pastor."

c. I confess, I don't usually feel like what I'm doing matters.

d. When we "complain" about being in ministry, we grumble against the great opportunity God has given us.

1. Remember, every profession has its headaches.

2. We often waste our prophetic voice by complaining instead of building up.

3. We are facing a shortage of pastors, especially in rural and small-town America.

4. Possibly because all we have heard are the complaints instead of the blessings of pastoring.

e. Not everyone gets to do this, at this level, and we should remember that.

2. Guard the gift of ministry:

a. The people you serve are a gift, love them well.

b. The money you manage is a gift, steward it well.

c. The opportunities you receive are a gift, utilize them well.

d. Our greatest fruit happens in the fields we bless, not the ones we curse.

3. The ministry God gives you deserves your best.
 - a. If you are a preacher, study preaching.
 - b. If you lead kids or teens, study what makes these generations tick.
 - c. We must consistently develop as people and as humans.
 1. My Presbyter and I travel once a year to preaching conferences to hone our skills and ministry calling.
 2. I'm constantly reading or listening to podcasts.

#3c. Guard your Family.

1. Billy Graham has a similar story to tell about when Ruth asked him to stay home with her because she was having labor pains. She asked him to cancel his speaking engagement at a meeting in Alabama. Graham refused. That evening Ruth delivered their daughter Gigi.

In 1949, at the famous Los Angeles crusade, Ruth's sister and brother-in-law came to the meeting. While they were together, Billy admired a child they were holding. "Whose baby is this?" Graham asked.

It was Anne, his daughter. In his later years, Graham, said that if he could do it over again, he would have devoted more of his time to his family.²¹¹

2. The Apostle Paul admonished church leaders to lead themselves and their families well, otherwise they were not qualified to lead a congregation.

a. I submit to you that if you win at church, and lose at home, you are have lost the greatest thing.

b. More than likely, we can find someone to replace you in the church, in the pulpit, or in the youth group. But we can't replace you at home.

3. Be intentional about being with your family.

¹ Jim L. Wilson, [*Pastoral Ministry in the Real World: Loving, Teaching, and Leading God's People*](#) (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 63.

- a. Take nights off.
- b. You don't have to be at every event.
- c. You can delegate opportunities.
- d. You can say "NO".
- e. My wife and I joke, "Only you can prevent forest-fires" to illustrate areas that only we can determine.
- f. Only you can keep the fires of your marriage hot.

4. Please don't let "family" become your excuse for poor ministry.

- a. A shift has taken place from ministers who were never home, to ministers who are not available or accessible.
- b. Not all situations can wait, therefore you must be aware that **ministry ALWAYS requires sacrifice.**
- c. **Rarely is ministry convenient or easy.**
- d. Use wisdom regarding when to say "yes" and when to say "no".
 - 1. Every "Yes" has a "no" attached.
 - 2. When you are constantly answering your phone at the dinner table, you are telling your family no.
 - 3. If you refuse to leave your kid's 50th tball game of the summer while a congregant member calls to announce their spouse just died, you are telling the family that Tball is more important than their loss

#3d. Guard your Reputation.

- 1. We are living in an age of great ministerial scandals and falls.
 - a. Some of the leaders of the Church Growth movement have fallen terribly recently.

b. Billy Hybels, James MacDonald, Mark Driscoll, Ravi Zacharias, Carl Lentz, Perry Noble are some of the bigger names.

c. Many more have fallen or simply disappeared.

2. What many of these men have in common is that their work was undone by their loss of reputation.

a. This is nothing new.

b. Jimmy Swaggert, Jim Bakker, and many others have experienced similar things.

3. What we need to know is that we are never too big or too small to fall.

a. We must guard our reputation.

b. 1 Thess. 5:22 tells us to "not give the appearance of evil."

c. Proverbs says, "Above all else, guard your heart."

4. As A/G ministers, on your credential renewal, you will be asked to abstain from alcohol in order to abstain from the appearance of evil.

a. You must be mindful of what you post on Social-Media.

b. You must be mindful of the language you use.

c. You must avoid sexual sin like the plague: 1 Cor. 6 "FLEE sexual immorality."

d. The A/G is a small-world, so don't talk or gossip about others.

Concluding Thoughts:

A. The Calling of God is amazing.

1. Ministry presents challenges, obstacles, joys, and delights.

2. Committing yourself to serve however and wherever God calls is a joy and delight.

3. Ministry is seasonal:

a. Where you are now will not be where you end up.

b. What you are doing now may change several times before it is all said and done.

4. Ministry is also a process:

a. Embrace the process the Lord has you in.

b. Learn the lesson that every season presents for you.

c. Enjoy the Call.

B. Do not do ministry alone.

1. Do not forsake your first love.

2. When you are discouraged, reset your eyes upon Jesus.

3. When you are tired, look upon Jesus who is the Renewer of our strength.

4. When you don't know what to say, be comfortable with silence and the ministry of Presence.

5. Endeavor to be Spirit-filled and Spirit-led.

C. Don't let hurts go to your heart.

1. Conflict and disappointments in ministry feel very personal.

2. Don't let your hurts define you.

3. Don't let hurt keep you from ministering in your calling.

Resources:

1. Preaching by Timothy Keller.

2. Pastoral Ministry in the Real World: Jim Wilson

3. The Care of Souls: Harold Senkbeil.
4. Grasping God's Word: Duvall and Hayes
5. How to Lead when you are Not in Charge. Clay Scroggins.
6. Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes.
7. Lead like a Shepherd. Larry Osborne
8. Help! I'm in Charge. Rod Loy
9. Leadership Pain. Sam Chand
10. Dangerous Calling. Paul David Tripp