

Advent Christian General Conference Minimum Ordination Standards

Explanation & Justification of Calling

The use of the word "calling" is found throughout the New Testament and is perhaps nowhere clearer than in Ephesians 4:1, where Paul urges the saints in Ephesus to walk in a worthy manner in light of that calling. In this passage Paul is talking about the call of faith, the call to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of one's sins. We are called to believe (Romans 8:30) but also walk or live in light of the call to salvation.

Calling in the scriptures comes from God by his grace and is for his purpose (Isaiah 43:1; 2 Timothy 1:9). One is not only called to walk in light of this calling but to walk in a worthy manner as Paul describes in the first three chapters of Ephesians.

In the scriptures we see a heavy emphasis on the call for people to follow God, ultimately in Christ and to live this calling out (1 Corinthians 1:26; 1 Thessalonians 2:11, 5:24; 2 Peter 1:10).

All Christians are called by God. But God also calls people to ministry tasks gifting and equipping to follow this call. God called Abram to pick up his family and move (Genesis 12). God called Moses to confront Pharaoh and lead his people out of Egypt and to the promised land (Exodus 3). God called people to do special work on the sanctuary (Exodus 31). God called Joshua to lead Israel and conquer the promised land (Joshua 1). God called Samuel in the middle of the night (1 Samuel 3). God called Isaiah and Jeremiah to prophecy (Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1). Jesus called Peter to feed his sheep (John 21). God calls Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9). God calls people to faith and special work.

God calls people to belief and service to himself for the benefit of the church. Ephesians 4:11 makes it clear that God gives or calls people in the church to minister and make the church stronger. In this God calls people to minister and he does this in many ways as we see in Scripture. It may be an internal sense or call, it may be a recognition through gifting and ability, and it may be another believer calls out something in a believer's life. Having a call from God to minister as pastor is a wonderful reality and God has given us teaching on how to pursue that call. Coupled with a call to minister, one must also desire or aspire to that call (1 Timothy 3:1) which means they are willing to be trained and assessed for this noble task.

1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 give us clear qualifications of what it looks like for someone to be called to Pastoral/Elder ministry. The internal call must be accompanied by external affirmation and commissioning by mature leaders (Titus 1:5). Paul took time to discern his call from God and submitted himself to the Jerusalem church before being sent out for ministry (Galatians 1:11-2:10).

In summary, the Bible speaks clearly on the nature and evidence of God's call upon one's life, for salvation ministry. It is upon the following criteria that a candidate's calling will be validated.

1. The inner conviction of a call and the testimony of a good conscience (Acts 26:16, 19; 1 Corinthians 9:16) for the candidate to ministry.

2. The approval and affirmation of the church in which the candidate for the ministry candidate Acts 13:1-4).
3. The approval of those charged with the care of said candidate to the ministry (Acts 9:15; Acts 13:1-4).

The Importance of Ordination Standards & Ministerial Committees

There are many who claim that ordination is not found in Scripture or that it is unimportant. While there are no specific chapters or verses that say, “Thou shalt have ordained pastors and formal ministerial committees to ordain these pastors,” Scripture consistently emphasizes that leadership in the church is too important to entrust to anyone who simply “feels called.” The doctrine and health of the church are matters of great concern in Scripture, and therefore we too should take the identification and evaluation of pastors seriously.

Scripture makes it clear that not all people should teach (James 3:1). A major part of pastoral ministry is the ability to teach (1 Timothy 3:2). A pastor must not only be able to teach sound doctrine but also refute those who contradict it (Titus 1:9). Add to this that a pastor must meet character qualifications (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; 1 Peter 5). While it is important for a potential pastor to have an internal calling and desire, it is important for mature leadership to train, evaluate, and affirm a person’s calling, character, gifting, and orthodoxy.

A pastor will only be able to protect the church from false doctrine and wolves (Acts 20:28-31) if they themselves know and affirm orthodoxy. This must be assessed by a group of mature leaders who also know what is sound (Titus 2:1). The book of Acts and the letters to Timothy show us the importance of accountability, evaluating, training, and affirming pastoral leadership (Acts 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14, 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6).

Once a pastoral candidate is assessed and affirmed by mature leadership, they should be visibly commissioned. We see a clear public commission of Joshua in Deuteronomy 31:1-8, 23; 34:9 as leadership of Israel transitions. In the church, commissioning for leading God’s people has historically been done via laying on of hands. The laying on of hands for ministry and blessing is well attested in Scripture (Genesis 48:14–22; Numbers 27:15–23; Deuteronomy 34:9; Mark 10:16; Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). While we do not ordain to a priesthood as in the Old Testament, we do ordain for the instruction, care, and protection of the flock. This practice signifies blessing and confirmation, which is why God’s Word warns us not to be hasty in laying on hands (1 Timothy 5:22). In ordination, the laying on of hands affirms that a person’s call is not merely internal or subjective but also external—publicly recognized and confirmed by those who have examined and tested the individual’s fitness for ministry.

Ordination standards set a guide for what to look for and assess in an individual seeking ordination or licensure. Having a unified standard gives clarity and unity as churches look for pastors. The leading of God’s church is too important to leave unclear and unregulated or rushed (1 Timothy 5:22). This does not mean that all standards are perfect, there is fallibility in what believers try to do on this side of God’s kingdom. However, God has given us enough in his Word to put together biblical and wise standards for those seeking ordination. Pastoring the Lord’s people is a difficult and noble task and the process of ordaining should show the care and seriousness contained in the office of pastor/elder.

Preamble to the Minimum Ordination Standards

The Advent Christian General Conference of America’s *Articles of Association and By-Laws* give Advent Christian General Conference (ACGC) guidance in its role and responsibilities

to the Advent Christian people. Article II states, “The object of this body shall be to serve the Advent Christian people in furthering the fellowship of their faith, in advancing the ordering of their church life, and in encouraging and administering their common endeavors to fulfill the Great Commission in all its intent, as follows:” Section 2 of Article states ACGC is, “to serve in advancing the ordering of their church life.” Section a of Article II.2 states ACGC is “to provide minimum criteria for the ordination of ministers.”

The following minimum ordination standards are just that, the minimum. It will be incumbent on conference ministerial committees to meet regularly to practice and uphold these standards. These standards do not set out a detailed process for how to achieve these standards. It is the responsibilities of each conference ministerial committee to develop and employ processes, procedures, assessments, and documents that best meet these standards. The Advent Christian General Conference does have a strongly recommended process and procedure example, but they are not part of the minimum standards. The goal of these minimum ordination standards is to bring a baseline unity to our denomination’s licensing of ministers and ordaining of clergy. It is up to each conference to decide if they will include in their standards separate standards and/or processes for licensed and/or ordained ministers. Our desire is that conferences would adopt these standards to guide them in prayerful assessment of potential ordination candidates.

Advent Christian General Conference Minimum Ordination Standards

I. Biblical Qualifications

1. The candidate will confess faith in Jesus Christ alone. (Romans 10:9-10)
2. The candidate will exhibit evidence of Christian character. (Matthew 5-7, Romans 12-13, I Corinthians 6:9-10, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, Galatians 5:16-24, Ephesians 4:17-5:21, Colossians 3, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-10, I Timothy 1:3-11, 3:1-13)
3. The candidate will aspire to elder/pastoral ministry (1 Timothy 3:1)
4. The candidate will exhibit evidence of elder qualifications. (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9)
5. The candidate will be able to give a satisfactory statement of a call to pastoral ministry.

II. Church Membership and Accountability

1. The candidate will be a member in good standing of an Advent Christian church within the ordaining conference.
2. The candidate will have a recommendation for ordination from the Advent Christian church in which they are a member in good standing in which the church affirms and gives evidence of the candidates call to pastoral ministry.
3. The candidate will be serving an Advent Christian church, a church institution or have received a call to such service.
4. The candidate's professional ethics and intention of cooperation must be affirmed by accepting and signing the "Pastoral Covenant and Code of Ethics" or other Code of Ethics agreement.
5. The candidate will submit to a criminal background check.
6. The candidate will submit in accountability to the ordaining conference's ministerial committee during the ordination process, and if ordained, throughout their ordained ministry in Advent Christian General Conference.

III. Education, Training, and Mentoring

1. The candidate will have completed a conference approved ministry training or degree program.
2. The candidate will engage in regular mentoring with a conference approved ordained pastor mentor throughout their ordination process.
3. The candidate will engage in regular supervised pastoral ministry practices within their local congregation (preaching, teaching, visitation/pastoral care, meetings, etc.).

IV. Denominational History and Doctrine

1. The candidate will affirm and adhere to the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith as state in the Advent Christian Statement of Faith.
2. The candidate will show thorough understanding of the Advent Christian Declaration of Principles.
 - i. The candidate will make known any areas of disagreement and defend their view and prove their view fits within historic Christian orthodoxy.

3. The candidate will possess a functional knowledge of Advent Christian history and polity.

V. Assessment and Examination

1. The candidate will evidence their abilities in biblical exegesis, hermeneutics, preaching and clear communication through:
 - i. Sermons
 - ii. Teaching
 - iii. Exegesis papers
2. The candidate will evidence their knowledge of scripture, theology, ethics and practical pastoral ministry through both written and oral examination before the conference ministerial committee.

VI. Reciprocity

1. Any ordained minister seeking to transfer credentials between Conferences within the Advent Christian General Conference shall be required to have satisfied these minimum standards.
2. Ministers previously ordained by another denomination or ordaining body who seek ordination and service within the Advent Christian General Conference must comply with and complete these minimum ordination standards and process in full, irrespective of prior credentials or affiliations.