

On the Value of Ordination

5 reasons why ordination matters to the EFCA pastor.

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Can't a person serve as a pastor without being formally ordained? Where do we see an ordination sequence in Scripture? Why would I take the time to submit to a lengthy ordeal when I'm busy running the church?

At times, I have shared these common objections to ordination, but I'm no longer convinced.

As I became more settled as a pastor in an EFCA church, I was prompted to do all I could for the people God entrusted to me. As I studied Scripture, it became clear to me that the pastorate involved confirmation from other Christians, accountability before the faithful, an examination of character and a demonstrated ability to rightly handle God's Word. The ordination process does precisely these things.

Having been recently ordained in the EFCA, I want to share five reasons why ordination matters and has significant value for the pastor and the local church.

1. The ordination process confirms a call to ministry. I know the idea of calling can be overused and even abused, but long-time pastors often have a strong sense of God's call on

their lives. Too often, people enter ministry as one career option among many, rather than a divine call to serve. Once a person senses this call, validation from godly brothers and sisters comes as a source of confidence. When there are difficult days at church, or I disappoint someone or feel that I've delivered a poor sermon, I take comfort that other leaders have formally recognized a pastoral gifting in me.

2. The ordination process shows the congregation I am willing to be held accountable to biblical standards. We've seen instances where a local church pastor is a gifted speaker with a likable public persona but works poorly with others and refuses correction. Ordination says this kind of church authoritarianism lies outside God's design.

3. In a fractured age, the ordination process connects the local church to a larger body. The EFCA's confessional standards lay out the contours of sound doctrine while avoiding unnecessary squabbling about tertiary things. Like the early creeds, this balanced approach boxes out what it needs to while allowing for maximal unity. The EFCA ordination process requires pastors and elders of other local churches to examine a candidate. This show of solidarity and trust displays the breadth and diversity of God's people. As things progressed, I found that God gave me a greater appreciation for other pastors in our district and an increasing love for the people of God. The initial vulnerability resulted in a sense of unity and strength.

4. The ordination process exposed my blind spots and helped me become a better pastor. I was challenged to think in new ways about how to care for people in difficult situations. For me, this included a deeper look into how to

counsel couples struggling with infertility; how to be helpful to those working in rapidly secularizing companies; and how to guide members with same-sex attracted loved ones. Each era of the Church faces new challenges. We need help from the wider Christian family in how to navigate these complex times in a way that honors the Lord Jesus.

5. Lastly, it is a mistake to separate theological rigor and pastoral care. Many people think that one can be a good theologian or a caring pastor. For too long, modern evangelicalism has outsourced theological studies to the academy while claiming to focus on church leadership. But the best theology is done from within the local church and in dialogue with Christ-followers living in challenging times. The EFCA properly values pastor-theologians.

Brothers and sisters, I am thankful to be ordained in the EFCA and to be counted among this expression of Christ's body. While ordination does require an investment, it's well worth it.