Credentials

A high-level, international guide to three different kinds of professional recognition

Board Certified Chaplain

Peer-reviewed certification for professional spiritual care practice.

Pastoral Counselor

A ministry-informed counseling identity; highly variable by country and credentialing body.

Licensed Counselor

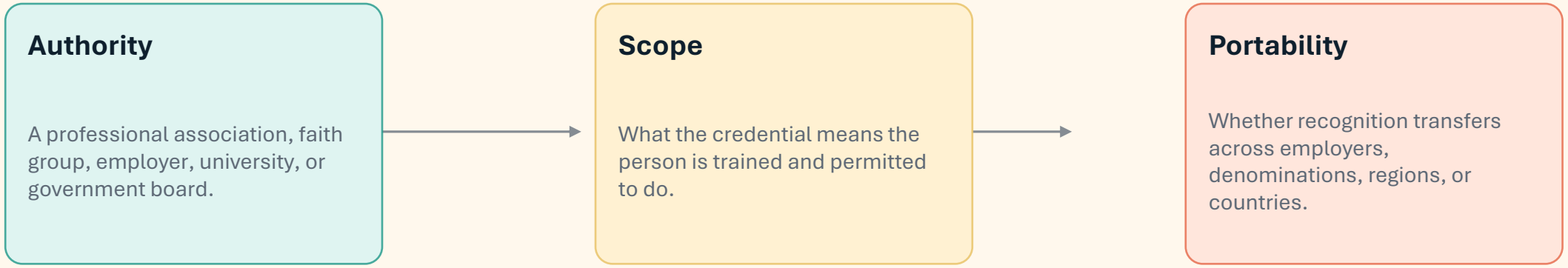
A legal credential for regulated mental health practice.

Key idea: certification, pastoral recognition, and legal licensure are related — but they are not the same thing.

Frame the conversation

Start with the kind of authority behind the credential

A credential matters most when it tells the public three things clearly: who granted it, what it authorizes, and where it is recognized.



Practical rule: ask, “Is this a certification, a ministry endorsement, an academic award, or a license?” Then check the local law and employer policy.

Credential 1 of 3

Board Certified Chaplain

A peer-reviewed credential showing advanced preparation for professional spiritual care in institutional settings.

Typical North American model

1. Graduate formation

Master-level theological, ministry, religious studies or equivalent formation.

2. Clinical Pastoral Education

Common benchmark: four units of supervised clinical pastoral education.

3. Faith recognition

Endorsement, commissioning or documented support from an appropriate faith or worldview body.

4. Practice experience

Substantial professional chaplaincy experience, commonly one full-time year or equivalent.

5. Peer review

Written materials, competency review, ethics, interview and continuing education.

International note: titles vary. Look for the recognized spiritual care credential used by the country, employer and faith community.

Sources include BCCI/APC certification requirements and BCCI Certification Manual

Credential 2 of 3

Pastoral Counselor

Pastoral counseling sits at the intersection of spiritual care, ministry, counseling skills and sometimes psychotherapy. The title is not globally uniform.

Theological grounding

Faith tradition, ministry formation, spiritual assessment and pastoral identity.

Supervised practice

Direct care hours, case consultation, use-of-self work and evaluated pastoral counseling encounters.

Counseling competence

Listening, assessment, helping skills, trauma awareness, referral judgment and cultural humility.

Ethics and boundaries

Scope clarity, confidentiality, supervision, continuing education and when to refer.

Important: pastoral counseling certification is not the same as permission to practice regulated psychotherapy or diagnose mental disorders.

Sources include ACPE, CPSP, CASC/ACSS and pastoral counseling career guidance

Credential 3 of 3

Licensed Counselor

A counseling license is a legal credential. It usually protects a title, defines scope of practice and creates public accountability through a regulatory body.

Common pathway

1 **Degree**

Master's or doctoral study in counseling, psychotherapy or a related mental health field.

2 **Practicum**

Supervised field placement during training.

3 **Supervised practice**

Postgraduate clinical hours under an approved supervisor.

4 **Exam**

National, regional or board-approved licensing examination.

5 **Board approval**

Application, ethics, law, background and title-use requirements.

6 **Renewal**

Continuing education and ongoing accountability.

Details change by jurisdiction. Hours, exams, titles and reciprocity rules can differ significantly.

Sources include NBCC, Florida Board of Clinical Social Work, Marriage & Family Therapy and Mental Health Counseling, and California LPCC guidance

Global application

International lens: translate the credential before you trust it

The same words can mean different things across countries, faith traditions and health systems.

1. Legal status	Is the title protected by law, or is it a voluntary certification?
2. Scope of practice	What may the practitioner actually do — support, counsel, assess, diagnose, treat?
3. Education equivalence	Will degrees, CPE units, practica and supervision transfer?
4. Oversight	Who receives complaints and enforces ethics or discipline?
5. Employer standard	Does the hospital, agency, insurer or faith group require a specific credential?

Putting the three together

Quick comparison

Use this as a first-pass distinction, not as a substitute for local credential review.

Question	Board Certified Chaplain	Pastoral Counselor	Licensed Counselor
Main purpose	Professional spiritual care competence	Spiritually informed counseling and pastoral care	Legal authority for mental health practice
Authority	Certifying body + faith endorsement	Credentialing body, faith tradition or employer	Government/regulatory board
Core evidence	Theology degree, CPE, practice hours, peer review	Theology and counseling degree, counseling training, supervision, CPE, and ethics	Degree, supervised practice, exam
Main caution	Certification does not equal psychotherapy licensure	Meaning varies widely by jurisdiction	License may not transfer across borders

Bottom line: credentials should clarify competence, protect the public and prevent people from practicing outside their lane.

Credentials should serve people, not confuse them.

When the credential is clear, the public knows what to expect — and professionals know how to stay within scope.

Sources referenced

- BCCI / Association of Professional Chaplains: Becoming Certified; Qualifications; Certification Manual
- ACPE: Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy and Spiritual Care Specialist program descriptions
- CPEI: Clinical Pastoral Education International CPE hybrid model. www.cpei.edu
- CPSP: clinical pastoral training and pastoral psychotherapy standards
- NBCC: National Certified Counselor process; state/provincial boards for licensure examples
- Florida LMHC and California LPCC public licensure guidance used as examples of jurisdictional variation

Verify local requirements before representing scope, title or legal authority.