

New Castle Presbytery
Process Guidelines for Commissioned Ruling Elders
Approved by CPMM November 11, 2021

Guided by the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (USA), New Castle Presbytery wholeheartedly endorses the call of Ruling Elders to particular pastoral service as Commissioned Ruling Elders when discerned by the individual in question, the sponsoring session, the Committee on Preparation for Missional Ministry (CPMM), the Committee on Ministers and Congregations, and the Presbytery as a whole.

These guidelines seek to lay out a process to be ordinarily followed by those seeking to be commissioned as ruling elders to particular pastoral service.

I. Inquiry Phase

The Inquiry Phase, similar to that of a person seeking ordination as a Teaching Elder, is a time of prayerful discernment into the shape of call within a person's life. Any Ruling Elder may seek to be enrolled as an Inquirer in the CRE process, while understanding that being enrolled does not guarantee a future commissioning to pastoral service.

A. Initial Steps

1. Explore the sense of call to serve as a CRE with the pastor/moderator of the church of membership or with a member of CPMM. This initial conversation can include the sense of call to service, the current understanding of the role of a CRE, and the gifts the inquirer brings to ministry.
2. Contact the chair of CPMM or the Connectional Presbyter to receive these guidelines and necessary forms.
3. Ask the Session of the church of membership to recommend to CPMM that the Ruling Elder in question be enrolled as an inquirer in the CRE process.
4. Complete the application form for enrollment into the process and return it along with the Session recommendation to the chair of CPMM.
5. Complete a background check facilitated by the Presbytery's Administrator/Assistant Stated Clerk.

B. Enrollment as a CRE Inquirer

1. Meet with CPMM for a conversation about sense of call, the submitted application forms, and the process.
2. After a successful vote to be enrolled as a CRE Inquirer, a mentor from the committee will be assigned to work directly with the inquirer through the process.

3. CPMM will determine an appropriate course of study based on the inquirer's current knowledge and experience and the requirements of the Book of Order.

4. Within one year of enrolling as an inquirer, the psychological evaluation, boundary training, and anti-racism training must be completed. Ordinarily, the cost of the psychological evaluation is shared equally between the inquirer, the inquirer's congregation of membership, and CPMM. Other arrangements may be explored when necessary. CPMM may choose to grant a waiver to the one-year timeline, but these items are mandatory in order to continue to candidacy. Failure to fulfill these requirements within a twelve-month period, or to seek an extension beyond twelve months, will result in removal from the process.

C. Training and Examination

1. Any classes taken towards the training requirements for this program must be approved by CPMM or be offered by entities previously approved by CPMM. These will generally include PC(USA) related seminaries, institutions, or other Reformed organizations with similar values and theology as the PC(USA).

2. A certificate of completion or other documentation must be submitted to CPMM to show successful completion of each class. CPMM may require either an interview or a brief paper showing mastery of the material.

3. The core required courses are listed below. Other courses or areas of instruction may be additionally required in order to prepare each CRE inquirer fully.

- Old Testament
- New Testament
- Reformed Theology
- Worship and Sacraments
- Preaching
- Presbyterian Polity
- Christian Education
- Pastoral Care
- Mission and Evangelism

4. CPMM may also require a supervised practice of ministry, such as supervised preaching, moderating, teaching a class, clinical pastoral education, or other experience designed to assist in both discernment of call and preparation for pastoral service.

5. During this time of training, the inquirer will have an annual consultation with CPMM and will have periodic conversations with the assigned mentor. These conversations will explore ongoing discernment of the inquirer's sense of call, gifts for ministry, and any challenges that arise during the process. The inquirer will also be invited to attend the quarterly CRE gatherings.

II. Candidacy Phase

- A. After successfully completing all requirements, a CRE Inquirer may ask to be enrolled as a Candidate.
1. The session of church of membership will be asked to complete a new recommendation form.
 2. The inquirer will complete a questionnaire about sense of call, spiritual and pastoral growth through the training process, and what commissioned ministry might look like.
 3. The inquirer will prepare a statement of faith and faith journey.
 4. Other requirements such as boundary training and anti-racism training will be fulfilled according to Presbytery guidelines.
- B. The inquirer will meet with CPMM for an extended interview. Among other issues of readiness, CPMM will discern “a candidate’s wisdom and maturity of faith, leadership skills, compassionate spirit, honest repute, and sound judgment” (G-2.0607).
- C. As a result of this interview, CPMM may choose to require additional training or experience before enrolling the inquirer as a candidate.
- D. If CPMM chooses to enroll the inquirer as a candidate, the inquirer will be invited to the next Presbytery meeting to be introduced and examined based on a statement of faith and faith journey.
- E. Following a successful examination by the Presbytery, the next step will be to discern to what particular ministry the candidate may be commissioned. Being enrolled as a CRE candidate does not guarantee being commissioned to pastoral service; it simply signifies a readiness to begin pastoral service when possible.

III. Commissioning to Pastoral Service

A. Discerning the Position

1. Ordinarily, a Commissioned Ruling Elder will not be commissioned to pastoral service in the church of membership (home church) but will be commissioned to service elsewhere in the Presbytery. Exceptions may be made for unusual circumstances where the mission of the Presbytery will be benefited by the exception.
2. A CRE may be commissioned to serve in a particular congregation in a general pastoral role, in a particular congregation in a specific pastoral role, or at the Presbytery level to fill either general or particular needs in a validated ministry. Again, the commissioning is guided by the Presbytery’s strategy for mission and ministry and the gifts and sense of call of the candidate for commissioning.
3. It is expected that the Committee on Ministers and Congregations (COMC) will be a partner in conversations about potential positions for ministry, and these

conversations may begin prior to an inquirer becoming a candidate. Once a position has been identified, any necessary interviews or conversations must occur before the commissioning to service may commence. Along with COMC, these conversations may be with the session of a particular church or with a committee or entity of the Presbytery.

B. Commissioning

1. The Presbytery holds the authority to commission a Ruling Elder to pastoral service and will examine the candidate for readiness and suitability of the intended position. Once a position has been discerned and the necessary steps followed, the Presbytery must receive a position description, including scope of pastoral ministry, what sacraments the CRE will be authorized to administer and in what settings, and the plan for Book of Order required supervision.

2. After the Presbytery votes in the affirmative to proceed with commissioning to pastoral service, the commissioning service will follow immediately. A special worship service celebrating the commission may be planned to mark the beginning of a particular ministry.

C. Service in the Home Congregation

After being commissioned to pastoral service by the Presbytery, a CRE should no longer serve in any capacity as an officer in their home congregation. This includes serving with the session as a ruling elder, clerk of session, or treasurer, or acting as a commissioner from the church to Presbytery meetings. The role of CRE becomes the primary role of service within the church.

IV. On-Going and General Requirements

A. Quarterly CRE gatherings for the purpose of ongoing learning, supervision and support (G-2.1004) will be offered, and will be open to those in the process as well as those serving in a particular ministry. Attendance at least once a year will be required as part of the Book of Order supervision mandate, in addition to an annual report to CPMM, which will be shared with the COMC liaison(s) to the church(es) the CRE is serving.

B. The Book of Order requires that a commission be renewed after no more than three years (G-2.1001). No later than six months before the end of the commission term, the CRE will meet with their mentor, a representative from CPMM, and a representative from COMC. The discussion will examine the ministry of the preceding period and future ministry needs, and will result in either a recommendation for the commission to be renewed or that the commission be celebrated as completed. In order for the commission to be renewed, a motion must be brought to and acted on by the Presbytery.

C. When a commission is completed, a CRE may either retire from active ministry or may return to the roll of candidates ready to receive a commission.

D. Current Presbytery-level mandatory training and regular background checks will be required in order to continue as a CRE or as a candidate ready to receive a commission.

E. Participation in the mission and ministry of the Presbytery and denomination is expected as part of a CRE's ministry. In this Presbytery, all CRE's have both voice and vote at Presbytery meetings by virtue of their commissioning.

F. Within the PC(USA), the office of Commissioned Ruling Elder is understood as a ruling elder who has been commissioned to pastoral service by the Presbytery. It is appropriate, after being commissioned, for a CRE to be called "Pastor," "Lay Pastor," or "Commissioned Lay Pastor." It is not appropriate for a CRE to use the title of "Reverend" or "Minister," both of which have specific uses in the Presbyterian Church.

BOOK OF ORDER CITATIONS (2019-2021)

G-2.10 COMMISSIONING RULING ELDERS TO PARTICULAR PASTORAL SERVICE

G-2.1001 Functions

When the presbytery, in consultation with the session or other responsible committee, determines that its strategy for mission requires it, the presbytery may authorize a ruling elder to be commissioned to limited pastoral service as assigned by the presbytery. A ruling elder so designated may be commissioned to serve in a validated ministry of the presbytery. Presbytery, in its commission, may authorize the ruling elder to moderate the session of the congregation to which he or she is commissioned, to administer the Sacraments, and to officiate at marriages where permitted by state law. This commission shall also specify the term of service, which shall not exceed three years but shall be renewable. The presbytery shall review the commission at least annually.

G-2.1002 Training, Examination and Commissioning

A ruling elder who seeks to serve under the terms of G-2.1001 shall receive such preparation and instruction as determined by the presbytery to be appropriate to the particular commission. The ruling elder shall be examined by the presbytery as to personal faith, motives for seeking the commission, and the areas of instruction determined by presbytery. A ruling elder who has been commissioned and later ceases to serve in the specified ministry may continue to be listed as available to serve, but is not authorized to perform the functions specified in G-2.1001 until commissioned again to a congregation or ministry by the presbytery.

G-2.1003 Commissioning Service

When the presbytery is satisfied with the qualifications of a ruling elder to serve a congregation providing the services described above, it shall commission the ruling elder to pastoral service as designated by the presbytery, employing the questions contained in W-4.04.

G-2.1004 Supervision

The ruling elder commissioned under the terms of G-2.1001 shall work under the supervision of the presbytery. The presbytery may at any time withdraw the commission for reasons it deems good and sufficient. A minister of the Word and Sacrament shall be assigned as a mentor and supervisor.